The FLOWER

of FAITH

A spiritual handbook

Moosa Qureshi

'Surely, we are from God and surely towards Him we return' [The Holy Qur'ān]

The Flower of Faith

Moosa Qureshi

Dear Professor Smith,

Please kindly do me the honour of reading pp. 1 to 3 of this humble book. Moosa موسیٰ

Love Peace & Islam Publications

PS Or perhaps pp. 38 to 42 would appeal more to your soul.

© LPI Publications and Moosa Qureshi

ISBN: 1 882494 50 4

Published by
LPI Publications
e-mail: moosa.qureshi@doctors.org.uk

Printed in USA
May, 2008

Printed at the Fazl-i-Umar Press, Chauncey, OH 45719

Contents

A Letter from Haḍūr aba iv
Foreword v
Introduction vi
Acknowledgements viii

1	The Rose	1
2	One God	4
3	The Truth	8
4	The Fātiḥah	11
5	Melancholy	18
6	The Seven Heavens	21
7	Two Deaths	26
8	Humility and the Needle	29
9	Justice	38
10	Perfect Understanding	43
11	Falsehood	47
12	The Last Chapters	51
13	Thankfulness	54
14	Trust and the Fire	60
15	Love	68
16	The Flame	74
17	Death of a Flower	78
18	Attachment to God	83
19	Istighfār	86
20	The perfect manifestation	89
21	A beautiful Edict	92

Postscript 98
Notes 102

A Letter from Haḍūr aba

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
نحمده و نصلی علی رسوله الکریم
وعلی عبده المسیح الموعود
خدا کے فضل اور رحم کے ساتھ
ھوالناصر

Baitul Fazl
London
29th May 2006

Dear Dr. M Qureshi Sahib,

اَلسَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللّٰهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهٗ

Just to let you know that I have found your dissertation entitled *'The Agony of Faith'* as very good.
I pray that Allah Almighty enhances your knowledge in abundance. Ameen.
Wassalam

Yours sincerely,

MIRZA MASROOR AHMAD
Khalifatul Masih V

Dr. M Qureshi
London

Foreword

The Flower of Faith is not light reading material; it is a unique book for a very specific reader. It is an elaborate guide for those who are deeply interested in embarking on a spiritual journey towards Allah, the final goal for all the souls. "*From Allah we came, and to Him is our return,*" is the Qur'anic declaration that this little-big book attempts to expound. Step by step, it leads the reader towards the mystical route that starts from the original source and takes us to our ultimate destination – the presence of God. The author explains various components that play a vitally important role to keep us moving on this path towards the final abode for our souls. Decked with the choicest jewels of God's own words taken from the Holy Qur'an, he illuminates his points in the light of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him), writings of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Messiah of our age (peace be on him), and quotations taken from eminent Muslim saints and scholars.

This book will certainly help the reader to understand the intricate and uphill process of re-uniting human souls with Allah, the Creator. In clear and simple language, the author elucidates moral and spiritual values such as repentance, truth, patience, reflection, reasoning, steadfastness, suffering, ego-annihilation, humility and thankfulness. Personal love for God and full trust in the Divine are essential steps to expedite the journey towards Him, and the author makes it clear how to stride upwards and reach the ultimate goal.

We need more young writers like Dr. Moosa Qureshi to discuss themes related to human spirituality, and I hope he will continue to write on similar subjects.

Mubasher Ahmad
Imam, Baetul Jaamay Mosque
Regional Missionary, West Midwest
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, USA.

Introduction

In the names of God – The Creator, The Maker, The Fashioner – His are the most beautiful names.

We live in a world of sorrow, and this book is for the alleviation of sorrow. It was first conceived in my heart, when I experienced a personal loss which created great turmoil within me. I remained in this condition until I went to work as a physician in a refugee camp, on the direction of Ḥaḍrat Khalīfatul Masīḥ V [aba].

The book then had a second birth, this time in my mind, on the night of the Kashmir Earthquake. My thoughts turned to God's Word, and I finally began to comprehend anew: what is faith. My fingers immediately flew to paper, to capture in words what my heart and mind had witnessed.

I should mention also that a good portion of the manuscript was written during a period of spiritual seclusion in Baitul Futuh Mosque, London.

God Himself forbids that any human should comment on the faith of another, and I am woefully unqualified to make pronouncements in this regard. Accordingly, the purpose of this book is not in any way to tell the reader that he or she either possesses or lacks faith. God alone knows the secrets of the heart. These words are intended only to encourage the reader in the throes of pleasure and affliction. Faith in One God as the Creator of both the heavens and the earth is not an easy matter.

Inner reflection and the journey undertaken within my soul has been, and continues to be, an arduous process. The first title I gave to this work was *The Agony of Faith*, which reflected my grief in writing it. However, as I travelled further into the reality of existence, I grew to understand that this sadness was a limited perspective on a far larger picture. As if one should find a thorn on a rose, and dwell too much on the thorn, and forget the charm of the rose. Thereupon, I altered the title to *The*

Flower of Faith. Nevertheless, I am yet a faltering novice on this path, and I consider myself an inept apprentice rather than an artisan. If there is anything good in this book, then it is from God, and if there is any error then it is from my self.

In the world of religion, as in other spheres of modernity, there is an increasing trend to emphasise form over substance. My earnest supplication is that we in the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community should redress this worrying global phenomenon. I pray that God should find this work acceptable in that regard, should support it, and should purify and strengthen hearts by it, as He graciously covers up my own human frailty in so many ways. May God Himself plant the Seed within us, and then cause the Flower to take root, to flourish, to blossom, to perfume, and to brighten our lives with His beautiful colours. Amen.

Please remember me in your prayers.

Moosa Qureshi
London, December 1, 2007 CE | Dhul Qa'dah 21, 1428 AH

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have contributed to this book directly or indirectly, by teaching me something of the path to God, and also by researching Arabic, Farsi and Urdu original texts on my behalf. I would particularly like to express my thankfulness to Ḥaḍrat Khalīfatul Masīḥ V [aba] for his inspiring sermons and the personal guidance he has afforded me. Maulāna Mubasher Ahmad of Illinois, USA merits special appreciation in recognition of his painstaking labours. He scrutinised the text of the original manuscript and offered invaluable advice on improving both content and style. I am also greatly indebted to my mother and father, who taught me so much of Islām. I thank my wife who proved invaluable in the evolution of *The Flower*.

I would be gravely remiss if I did not acknowledge also the great spiritual teachers of humankind. In Islām, we customarily follow their names by prayers to express our reverence for them. The abbreviation [saw] has been used throughout this book on mentioning the Holy Prophet Muḥammad, meaning *ṣallallāhu 'alaihi wasallam* (peace and blessings of God be upon him). The names of other Divine messengers have been followed by [as], abbreviating *'alaihis salām* (on whom be peace). The companions of the prophets have been followed by [ra], which means *raḍī Allāhu 'anhu/'anha* (may God be pleased with him/her). The abbreviation [aba] signifies *ayyadahullāhu ta'āla bi nasrihil azīz* (may God the Exalted support him with His mighty help), and this prayer follows the name of the living caliph of God.

Finally, there are those whose names I cannot mention without their permission. They are in my prayers.

CHAPTER ONE

The Rose

God's rose is decorated with petals of matchless beauty and sheltered by thorns of exquisite pain. It is not possible to acquire that rose without suffering, as God says:

"And We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and fruits; but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere.
Who, when a misfortune overtakes them, say 'Surely, we are from God and surely towards Him we return'". [Qur'ān 2.156-157]

That is to say, the love of our security and our food and our wealth and our lives and our fruits removed us from attachment exclusively to God. The loss of those loved ones engenders suffering, but it is only through such loss that we can return to God. In other words, the common understanding is that the wealth or the departed beloved returns to God when we are deprived of it; but the more profound understanding is that it is we who return to God by the dispossession of these desired world-objects. Rūmī describes this in his mystical masterpiece Mathnawī by the imagery of the royal falcon who loses his way in the world when God sets him free. The falcon addresses the worldly owls of the night: "This ruin is a thriving abode in your eyes; for me, however, the King's forearm is the place whither one returns" [1]. The truth is that suffering for the sake of God brings a person closer to the Divine. Thus God says that He raised Prophet Jesus [as] towards Himself on account of that noble prophet suffering the torment of crucifixion [Qur'ān 4.158-9]. In fact, suffering in the way of God invariably exalts the victim spiritually towards God. For this reason, all the prophets suffered tremendously, and God elevated the Holy Prophet Muḥammad [saw] by suffering more than any other prophet [2]. For this reason also, the Promised Messiah [as] affirms that he worries for the faith of those of his followers who have not suffered [3]. In these days, we witness how the

tragedies that afflict nations foment goodness, and protect from evil. The earthquake which has wreaked havoc in Kashmir and Pakistan has also caused an outpouring of unselfish generosity in this holy month of Ramaḍān not only by those nations but by the international community, and it is often observed that suffering encourages proximity to God.

The statement *innā lillāhi* (surely we are from God) signifies that we belong to and originate from and are born through the mercy of God. The Holy Prophet [saw] teaches us that every human is born with a primordial purity of soul, and that Islām is in the nature of humans [4]. However, unlike the sun and the moon and the stars who remain in obeisance to God [Qur'ān 22.19], humans stray from their original state of submission to God, and they are deluded by materialistic desires. Spiritual life is the Love for God and spiritual death is the love for the world, and it is the suffering engendered by the struggle between these two loves which improves our condition: "[Blessed is He] Who has created death and life that He might try you – which of you is best in deeds" [Qur'ān 67.3]. In this sense, life is attained only by those whose hearts utter *ilaihi rāji'ūn* (towards God we return) and death is the absence of God from the heart. For this reason, God asserts that those who are killed in His way are living, and not dead [Qur'ān 2.155, 3.170], because their death is in itself a means of returning spiritually to God. Note that a correct understanding of *innā lillāhi* is a necessary pre-condition for *ilaihi raji'ūn*. We return to what originates us.

It is commonly asserted that a person is strengthened by what does not destroy him, but remember this that suffering should engender awareness of our frailty. Only the world deceives us that we are independent and possess power in the face of adversity. For the reality of humankind is that we are nothing but beggars unto God [Qur'ān 35.16]. Who is the beggar who claims that he enjoys fortitude? Rather, the trials of this world cause the believer to appreciate that he is created from an insignificant fluid [Qur'ān 32.9]. This realisation of one's fragility then brings the believer as a slave to his Master. By this path have the prophets and saints attained and held fast always to humility. If they were to cast their eyes towards their fellow men, then most surely they would be cognizant of their own superiority. But the prophets' eyes are turned always towards

God. They deliver His message, and they are the most fearful of Him for they fear none else [Qur'ān 33.40]. Is this strength? God says, "And when My slaves ask thee about Me, then I am Near. I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he prays to Me" [Qur'ān 2.187]. Thus the saints enjoy nearness to God as His slaves. Is this power? Assuredly they are strong with respect to others, but weak with respect to God. And as God is reality and all else is illusory, then the reality of faith is to make oneself the weakest of the weak and the most fearful of those who fear. How may one enjoy a relationship with *Al Mālik* (The Master), unless one is named *'Abdullāh* (the slave)?

CHAPTER TWO

One God

The essence of our teaching is that there is One worthy of worship. For God soon follows the words "Surely, we are from God and surely towards Him we return," with the proclamation: "And your God is One God" [Qur'ān 2.164]. *Tauḥīd*, or Unity of God, is that there is One Origin and One Destination. As God says, "Wherever you be, God will bring you all together" [Qur'ān 2.149], and then also, "To God belong the East and the West" [Qur'ān 2.143]. That is to say, all paths lead to God.

This may be understood when God declares, "O Iblīs, what hindered thee from submitting to what I had created with My two hands?" [Qur'ān 38.76]. Iblīs, who is known in English idiom as Lucifer or Satan, refused to obey God's instruction to fall prostrate before Prophet Adam [as], and God's subsequent reprimand makes specific mention of His *yaday* (two hands). Early scholars, such as Ṭabrisī, explain that the expression *yaday* refers to God's power [5]. Ibn al 'Arabī agrees with Tabrisī, but he also comprehends the question of duality in this verse: "He [God] has also attributed of Himself pleasure and wrath, having created the Cosmos as [expressing] both fear and hope, fear of His wrath and hope for His pleasure.... God unites the polarity of qualities only in Adam, to confer a distinction on him. Thus, He says to Lucifer, 'What prevents you from prostrating to one whom I have created with My two hands?'" [6]. That is to say, God has created man in such a way that man may only approach the One God by a duality of fear and hope. As God says, the believers "call on their Lord in fear and hope" [Qur'ān 32.17]. These are motivational realities which exist as the two wings of Rūmī's falcon, allowing it to soar in a balanced trajectory towards God. But also, it is only man who is honoured by God with free will, so that man is able to choose between the two hands of God's mercy or His wrath. Both relationships exist here as positional realities with respect to God. Man can exist as Rūmī's falcon, or man can exist as Rūmī's owls who prefer to dwell in the darkness of worldly

pleasures. This duality exists in our approach to God, but the Destination is One. "To Him belongs whatever dwells in the night and the day" [Qur'ān 6.14]. Herein we find embedded the enigmatic co-existence of predestination and free will. In fact, predestination is inherent in the Unity of God. However, God Himself affirms that His Unity incorporates the dūality which is found in humankind: "And no soul can believe except by the permission of God. And He makes wrath descend on those who do not use their reason" [Qur'ān 10.101]. That is to say, belief can originate only from the One God, and also from Him is wrath, but God does expect us to move towards belief and away from wrath, by employing our rational faculties. In this regard, note that predestination is valid from the perspective of God, and free will is equally valid from the perspective of humankind; they operate at different strata of reality.

Again, the question of Unity is addressed in the following verse: "And He is God, [both] in the heavens and in the earth. He knows your inside and your outside" [Qur'ān 6.4]. Both the heavens inside our souls, and the earth which exists outside of our souls, must acknowledge One God. It is not for us to return to God, other than by this path. We do not worship One God in our spiritual affairs, and worship another god or gods in our worldly affairs. We do not ponder the Holy Qur'ān and recite prayers, and then go about telling lies and backbiting and behaving viciously towards God's creatures. Such behaviour offends against the Unity of God. For this reason, Al Jīlānī advises, "Your exterior and interior states must be one" [7]. A person may ask how it is possible to worship the same God in the heavens and in the earth, when the world appears to pull us away from spiritual matters. This question will be considered in Chapter Nine. Suffice to say, at this point, that a believer cannot return to God, other than by *Tauḥīd*. For it is by this means that a person fulfils the two obligations of Islām whereby he approaches ever closer to God. It is Unity which results in good actions towards God's creation, and also in worship exclusively of the Creator; as God says, "Your god is only One God. So let him who hopes to meet his Lord do good deeds, and let him join no one in the worship of his Lord" [Qur'ān 18.111].

This concept may also be understood through Sūrah al Fātiḥah, comprising the comprehensive introductory Chapter of the Holy Qur'ān. Every verse of God's Word has a relationship with Sūrah al Fātiḥah which is the Mother of God's Word, and *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn* (surely we are from God and surely towards Him we return) is deeply connected to *iyyāka na'budu wa iyyāka nasta'īn* (Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we beseech for help) within The Fātiḥah. A person says that "we are from God", and thus acknowledging that every atom and aspect of his inner and outer self is from God, he is left with no possibility but to cry out, "Thee alone we worship" because the particles of his being must worship What originated them. Then the person finds that the world draws him away from the love of God, and he finds his way back to "towards Him we return" by leaving the company of the worldly mendicants, and declaring, "Thee alone do we beseech for help".

As we mentioned that the Promised Messiah [as] feared for the faith of one who has not suffered. Therefore God has incorporated suffering and loss into the fundamental structure of Islām, so that no Muslim should be bereft of its benefits. In fact, all the five fundamentals of Islām are pillars [8] which support the roof of *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*. God says that He will try us with hunger [Qur'ān 2.156], and this is understood by all Muslims during this holy month of Ramaḍān. The Holy Prophet [saw] tells us that some deeds have a tenfold reward, some have a seven hundredfold reward, but God Himself rewards those who fast [9], and this is the best reward. Why is this so? The answer is because most deeds where the believer eschews something for the sake of God have a component of benefit for the believer. But during the holy month of Ramaḍān, we are commanded to give up good wholesome nourishment for the sake of God, and even we are required to give up water, which is the source of all physical life, for His sake alone. When we give up even the goodness of this world, then we are left with nothing but God Himself, and this is why God is our reward. If we examine the conditions of *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*, we find that our return to God is by the loss of that which nourishes us of this world [Qur'ān 2.156-157]. For those very things are the most deceptive of illusions which veil us from the presence of God. Therefore,

fasting in the holy month of Ramaḍān is nothing else but a methodology for *ilaihi rāji'ūn*. Examining the other pillars of Islām, we find the same.

CHAPTER THREE

The Truth

It should be understood therefore that the loss of this world is nothing but a means for our gain in the next world, but there are certain conditions that must be met. The least required for converting loss into gain are taught to us by the Holy Qur'ān in the Chapter of the Late Afternoon [Qur'ān 103]: belief, good action, a perfect understanding of The *Ḥaqq* (Truth), and patience. Here, belief yields good action, and The *Ḥaqq* yields patience. Perfect understanding of The *Ḥaqq* is a deep subject. The *Ḥaqq* is one of the names of God, and it describes His attribute of Truth and Absolute Reality. That is to say, we must be convinced of the Absolute Reality of God, in order to move towards Him. Because the world is more tangible for a person than God, this is the reason why he is pulled towards the world and he finds difficulty in returning to God. As the Promised Messiah [as] explains, that person is fearful of tigers and serpents [10], but he is not fearful of offending God because he has not acquired perfect understanding of the reality of God. The word *Ḥaqq* affirms that there is a Reality which is greater than the deceptive realities of this world, and if we find this *Ḥaqq* then we are no longer in the late afternoon of this world, nor are we trapped in a condition of loss. Because for that fortunate person who finds The *Ḥaqq*, the world no longer exists, therefore how can he lose it? However, on our journey of seeking The *Ḥaqq*, we are all tried severely by the illusory existence of the world. In this regard, we may borrow Plato's allegory of those who spend the entirety of their lives chained up in a gloomy subterranean cave [11]. False echos and shadows having taken on the substance of reality, it is an immense hardship for such people to leave that cave and for their perceptive faculties to adjust to the light. Plato offers a further insight and explains that on turning their faces towards heaven, at first those cave-dwellers would find it easier to gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars, rather than directly the Sun. But after beholding the Sun, those same people would never willingly return to

their imprisonment in the cave. So it is for those who find The *Ḥaqq*.

Many times in our daily lives, we are tested and if we examine ourselves with the eye of absolute truth, then we will see so much falsehood that our every step seems the step of falsehood and even our every breath seems the breath of falsehood. For this reason, God has placed so much emphasis on honesty in our daily lives, as a manifestation of giving precedence to The *Ḥaqq* over our worldly concerns, and thus we are enabled to move towards God. Faith and truthfulness are inextricably entwined, and *kufr* is the covering up of truth. Although there is the established meaning of *kufr* which is to cover up belief in God, but in fact every falsehood is a sign of *kufr*, because God is The *Ḥaqq*. Falsehood is also allied to *shirk*, which is idol-worship or the adoration of anything outside of God; and thus God says, "Shun therefore the abomination of idols, and shun all words of untruth" [Qur'ān 22.31]. Therefore, it is a certainty that truth is one of the fundamental principles of Islām, and no person can return to God except by the path of truth. But this path is also the path of immense hardship, and for this reason we are exhorted to *ṣabr* (patience). In fact, *ṣabr* is rooted in the truth, and this is why God speaks of them together with the words "and they exhort one another to truth and they exhort one another to patience" [Qur'ān 103.4]. The harshness of the world cannot compel one who has beheld The Truth. That is to say, The *Ḥaqq* makes easy the development of *ṣabr*. Why does a man tell lies, except that he gives more importance to the world than to God. And why does a man find it difficult to demonstrate patience in the face of worldly afflictions, except that he forgets God. Perfect understanding of The *Ḥaqq* is to know at the same time that God is Reality and the world is illusory. Remember that *ṣabr* is not the mere tolerance which may be demonstrated by even a non-believer as a natural trait. The *muṣābirīn* are those patient believers who are afflicted with every kind of worldly loss in the path towards God, and they shrug it off as a new-born butterfly shrugs off her skin. For their faces are turned exclusively towards God and their backs are turned towards the world, as Prophet Abraham [as] said, "I have turned my face toward [God]... and I am not of those who worship other [worldly]

things" [Qur'ān 6.80]. But for this purpose, we must be firm on adoration of The *Ḥaqq*.

Furthermore, as God is Himself The Truth, so it follows that *īmān* or faith in Him is tested by the truthfulness of a person. It is not sufficient that a person professes verbally that he has faith in God. Not a single instance in the Holy Qur'ān or in the history of spirituality can be cited where a person acquired faith by dint of mere verbal affirmation. On the contrary, faith was forged always on the anvil of truthfulness and in the furnace of suffering; and it shall be forever so. God says, "Do men think that they will be left alone because they say, 'We believe,' and that they will not be tested? And We did test those who were before them. So God will surely distinguish those who are truthful and He will surely distinguish the liars" [Qur'ān 29.3-4]. This means not only that God will test the truthfulness of a person's affirmation of faith, but it also conveys that faith itself belongs exclusively to those who are truthful. Elsewhere, God says, "O ye who possess faith! fear God and be among the truthful ones" [Qur'ān 9.119]. Faith by necessity leads always to fear of God and truthfulness.

Truth is thus a fundamental, because that which is outside truth fails and withers away: "Falsehood does indeed vanish away" [Qur'ān 17.82]. A person who confounds the truth with falsehood surely strays in confusion from his objective, and a person who hides the truth surely loses the path of return to God. For this reason, God allows no other way and says, "Confound not the truth with falsehood nor hide the truth knowingly" [Qur'ān 2.43]. This command is a response to our heartfelt plea in Sūrah al Fātiḥah: "Guide us to the straight path". Sūrah al Fātiḥah, which is the opening Chapter of the Holy Qur'ān, itself leads to The *Ḥaqq*.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fātiḥah

The praise is for God, Lord of the worlds.
The Most Gracious, The Ever Merciful.
Master of the Day of Judgment.
Thee alone do we adore, and Thee alone do we implore for help.
Guide us to the straight path,
The path of those upon whom Thou has bestowed blessings;
Not of those upon whom is displeasure,
Nor of those who are lost astray.
[The Fātiḥah, Qur'ān 1.2-7]

If we dive deep into the oceans of Sūrah al Fātiḥah, then we find that its every verse sheds light on the light of *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*. For God says that the meaning of the Holy Qur'ān is found with Him in *ummil kitāb* (the mother of the Book), which is The Fātiḥah [Qur'ān 43.5]. The Promised Messiah [as] has opened up the fact that Sūrah al Fātiḥah comprises five oceans which he explains are God's inimitable Name *Allāh*, and His attributes of *Rabbil 'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), *Ar Raḥmān* (The Most Gracious), *Ar Raḥīm* (The Ever Merciful), and *Māliki Yaumuddīn* (Master of the Judgment Day). He has also elucidated that The Fātiḥah describes five human needs as beneficiaries which correspond to each of these oceans. That is to say, Sūrah al Fātiḥah comprehensively delineates the modes whereby humankind may enjoy a relationship with the limitless reality of God. "Look deep if you are one of the discerning," writes the Promised Messiah [as] [12]. May God enable us to fulfil this recommendation by the Imām of the age.

We are from God, and so we say *Al ḥamdu lillāh* (the praise is for God); then we return to Him because He is the *Rabb* (Lord) of the *'ālamīn* (our external and internal worlds). The first words *Al ḥamdu lillāh* also remind us that the return to God cannot be from our own efforts, and that the praise for this

journey should be attributed fundamentally to God, because we created finities cannot by our own labours return towards the Creative Infinity.

God is *Ar Raḥmān* and we originate from Him Whose graciousness or *raḥmāniyyat* we do nothing to merit, and He is *Ar Raḥīm* that He rewards those of us who endeavour to return to Him. The process of returning to God is more obviously remembered when we proclaim that God is *Māliki Yaumuddīn*, because then we stand before Divine Judgment, but such a proclamation should encourage our return to God in this very life. For the prophets and the saints, every day is a Day of Judgment and God is acknowledged as their Master in the now, because they have achieved death of the ego in this same life. They have relinquished all rights and they are mere slaves of the Master. The Promised Messiah [as] affirms, "*Mālik* is the word which does not admit of any rights [for the servant], and this expression can be applied in its fullness only to God for He alone is the Perfect Master" [13].

The relationship between *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn* and *iyyāka na'budu wa iyyāka nasta'īn* has already been elucidated. By worshiping God alone and beseeching Him alone, a believer abandons the worship of and dependence on worldly objects such as wealth, spouse and children. The reader is reminded that we utter this prayer in the grammatical plural, both as an aspiration for one's fellow supplicants in congregational prayer [14] and also as a personal affirmation on behalf of the plurality which exists within each one of us as an individual. "Thee alone do we adore" means that an individual devotes the collective of his intimate spiritual faculties to God. The Promised Messiah [as] explains, "The use of the plural pronoun 'we' in this context indicates that all our faculties are occupied in His worship and are prostrate at His threshold. Every person by virtue of his inner faculties is a community and a nation. The prostration of one's entire faculties before God constitutes the condition referred to as Islām" [15]. By this process, a believer may then assert that he has returned from the worldly loves to the love unique of God.

Note it is not accidental that we pledge our devotion to God immediately after acknowledging Him as *Māliki Yaumuddīn*. On

that day, even the disbelievers will cry out and pretend allegiance to God, for it is the day of Reality when all doubts and objections will be swept away. Remembrance of that day engenders devotion to God. In truth, a person cannot fully grasp the handle of *iyyāka na'budu wa iyyāka nasta'īn* until he achieves death of the ego and arrives at the Day of Judgment before departing this world. The Promised Messiah [as] says, "Such a death is the source of spiritual birth" [16].

We then proceed to ask God to guide us on *ṣirāṭ al mustaqīm* which is the rightly directed path, and undeniably this is the path which leads from love of the world to love of the Divine. For love is rightly directed only when its objective is God. Sūrah al Fātiḥah informs us of the glad tidings that God bestows blessings on those who follow this path, because such believers are moving towards the Love of God, and God's Love is their reward, and this is the greatest of benedictions which is beyond even our imagination to entirely appreciate.

Significantly, the last words of Sūrah al Fātiḥah do not mention God, and this is because they speak of the natural consequence of God's absence from the heart. Such a condition where the heart is permeated with the worldly love leads to *maghḍūb*, which is displeasure not exclusively of God but the entire universe is displeased with such a person. Although such a person is intensely desirous of worldly pleasures, in the end he finds that the world conspires against him and fails to satisfy him and in fact the world destroys such an unfortunate one. This is why God does not say that He is displeased with such a person, but that "displeasure" [of the entire universe] is upon that person. And this is the result when a person goes astray and forgets that he is from God, and that his prosperity resides in the return towards God, and instead he clings to the things of this world such as wealth, family or social status. Such persons who have lost touch with the reality of their origin and their destination, they are therefore described as *ḍāllīn* (those who have gone astray). They are picked up by God from the dirt of faithlessness, and then they eschew God's grace in favour of the dirt, but they find that the dirt no longer comforts them but rather it rejects them. Prophet Krishna [as] is reported to have said, "Pleasures from external objects are wombs of suffering, Arjuna... No wise man seeks joy among them" [17].

From another perspective, The Fātiḥah describes the entire spectrum of human experience and it provides a path of return to God from wheresoever one begins the journey. It may be thought that the first verses describe only God, and that humanity does not enter The Fātiḥah until we proclaim, "Thee alone do we adore". But we find also that the Divine addresses humanity in every verse of The Fātiḥah. From this aspect, the worst condition of humanity is mentioned as *ḍāllīn* or those who have no relationship with God, having gone entirely astray. Better than this is *maghḍūb*, where at least a person enjoys a relationship with God, but it is a relationship of displeasure. As for the lover, displeasure is always preferable to indifference. Even more desirable is that the Beloved should bestow blessings on one who follows the straight path. By this, one may attain the limits of humanity, where the faculties of the body, the mind and the soul state, "Thee alone do we worship and adore".

To go further than this, we must first understand that the Holy Qur'ān is for the guidance of those who are alive in this world, rather than for those who have already departed for the Hereafter. Therefore, The Fātiḥah is to be manifested while we are in this world, and so it is for *Māliki Yaumuddīn* (Master of the Judgment Day). Here a slave leaves the limits of humanity and enters the presence of the Divine in this very world. He becomes aware of God's judgment so that his soul is governed by this awareness, and thus he abandons every sinful action and desire. "They die before their death, and though they appear to be in this world, they in truth dwell in the other world" [18]. As a result, the slave is rewarded by God's *raḥīmiyyat* (mercy). And then God brings this most fortunate lover yet closer towards Himself, and he realises that God is *Ar Rahmān* for he travels further than he can travel by merit. At this point, he knows that there is nothing of judgment but rather there is only grace. As the Promised Messiah [as] writes that when he first perceived the Holy Qur'ān, he saw the staff of Moses [as]; but on journeying further into God's Word, he witnessed the mercy of Jesus [as] [19]. It is undeniable that the general experience of humankind is that as one approaches very close to God, one enters *raḥmāniyyat* (God's Graciousness), whereas at a distance one is in *yaumuddīn* (God's Judgment). By understanding this fundamental

relationship between the Creator and the created, we are better able to grasp why God is reported to say, "Verily, My mercy overcomes My anger" [20]. As we all are returning towards God, willingly or unwillingly, therefore by definition we are travelling towards mercy.

And yet there is a final stage which is higher than God's Judgment or God's Graciousness, and this is God Himself. How to fear punishment or desire reward, when the praise is for God alone, and He is Lord of our worlds? This is the meaning of *Rabbil 'ālamīn*, that God Himself is the Provider for our worlds, and that this is His reality, which is disguised as it were, beneath heaven and hell. For this reason, that God is beyond the pleasures even of heaven, the Promised Messiah [as] explains that God's *rubūbiyyat* is something that is disclosed after the perfection of a man's love for God [21]. Alas, if only humankind were to understand the depth of *Al ḥamdu lillāhi rabbil 'ālamīn*. Were we to say that these words are the pinnacle of the Qur'ānic exegesis and the summation of our spiritual purpose, then we would perhaps be accused of exaggeration. However, it is declared by the Holy Prophet [saw] that *Al ḥamdu lillāhi rabbil 'ālamīn* in itself is "the most superior chapter of the Qur'ān, and it is the seven verses, and it is the magnificent Qur'ān" [22]. For if God is the Lord of all our internal and external worlds, then it follows by natural inference that nearness to Him is desired and distance is abhorrent, and this principle in turn describes the entirety of the relationship between God and humankind. *Islām* (submission) is completed only when it is to the *Rabbil 'ālamīn*, hence Prophet Abraham [as] declares, "I have submitted to the Lord of the worlds" [Qur'ān 2.132]. Of a truth, it is the prophets who point towards God as our exclusive objective.

"Is not God sufficient for His servant?" [Qur'ān 39.37]. It should be noted that in the first instance, this verse was revealed with regard to the Holy Prophet [saw] himself. This consummate messenger extols The Fātiḥah as no other messenger, for which reason he is known by the name *Muḥammad*. That is to say, the pinnacle of The Fātiḥah is *al ḥamd* for God, and the pinnacle of The Fātiḥah is correspondingly *Muḥammad*, who is the perfect manifestation of *ḥamd* (praise). For when a person submits his ego entirely to God, so that God becomes his *Rabbil*

ʿālamīn, then nothing is left of that person, and all that remains is God, and so by annihilation of the ego, he attains the status of *Muḥammad* (the praiseworthy). This is how at the same time we assert that the praise is for God and also that Muḥammad is praiseworthy. So this beautiful Messenger comprehends the entirety of Sūrah al Fātiḥah in his character, for he is of a different category of spiritual existence from all other human beings. We discover that the journey of The Fātiḥah in the person of Muḥammad [saw] begins with, "And He [God] found thee [Muḥammad] in a state of *ḍāll* and He guided thee" [Qur'ān 93.8]. That is to say, God Himself applies the word *ḍāll* to the Holy Prophet [saw]. The Promised Messiah [as] denies emphatically that, God forbid, this should signify the Holy Prophet [saw] was in a stage of misguidance. Rather, when applied to the Holy Prophet [saw], the word *ḍāll* means that he was lost in love for God and wandering in search of God and for this reason God guided him [23]. In fact, we find the highest consciousness of the Holy Qur'ān in the person of the Holy Prophet [saw], regarding whom The Fātiḥah may be paraphrased as follows: "O my Lord, do not leave me here, lost in love for Thee. Nor permit the displeasure of the world, which always seeks to harm those who love Thee, to touch me. Guide me instead to that straight path of the Infinity of Thy blessings. By which path, I may attain to this condition that all my faculties are enslaved to Thee alone, and also that my fellow supplicants should follow me in devotion. By which path, my ego should die so that I stand before Thee as my Master Who is Merciful. Then carry me, my Lord, to Thy Grace, and finally to where Thou art the Lord of all my internal and external worlds, that I may be the perfect manifestation of praise for God. And my name is Muḥammad".

It may be noted by the reader that our exposition of The Fātiḥah is from two directions. That is to say, God speaks to man and man speaks to God. God says, "Submit," and man replies, "I have submitted" [Qur'ān 2.132]. This exchange is the forwards and backwards of Sūrah al Fātiḥah. The first direction is the forwards movement, from God to man, and the second direction is reversed from man toward God. The anterograde motion through The Fātiḥah describes first God's Greatness and then our dependence on Him, and is necessary for a right understanding of worship. The retrograde movement reminds

us that our loftiest destination and objective is not heavenly pleasure, but rather it is God Himself.

Furthermore, it may be observed that as one travels backwards through The Fātiḥah, one continues to exist until the climax of *Al ḥamdu lillāh* which signifies non-existence of the self. Know that it is not only in *iyyāka na'budu* that we exist outside of God, but also there is an element of "we" and "Thou" in God's *malikiyyat*, His *raḥīmiyyat* and His *raḥmāniyyat*. That is to say, the return from world-reality towards God-reality by means of The Fātiḥah is experienced in the following sequence: "Thee alone do we implore for help and Thee alone do we worship, O Master of the Day of Judgment, Ever Merciful and Most Gracious." All of this is "we" and "Thou" for the devotee exists outside of the Divine in all these Qur'ānic supplications. In the retrograde motion, it is only when a believer attains to the final destination of *Al ḥamdu lillāh*, that The Fātiḥah is transformed to the grammatical third person, signifying the termination of "we" and "Thou", and there is no mention of the devotee because at this point only God exists. Here we find the *Ḥaqq*, where God in Himself is an Absolute Reality and all else in itself is falsehood, and verily at this point the believer's self must vanish, because falsehood is bound to vanish [Qur'ān 17.82]. This is also essential for worship, and it is the end-point of prayer, and for this reason God tells us, "And the conclusion of their prayer shall be, 'The praise is for God, Lord of the worlds'." [Qur'ān 10.11].

CHAPTER FIVE

Melancholy

Sorrow is a natural and healthy human emotion, and it is deeply affiliated to Love; that is to say, the heart which loves is oft the heart of sorrow. It is related that once a Bedouin was sitting with Prophet Muḥammad [saw], and that the Bedouin told how he had buried his own daughter alive for fear of the ignominy that female offspring inspired in the Days of Ignorance, before the advent of Islām. When he looked upon the Holy Prophet [saw], he saw that the Messenger of God [saw] was weeping so profusely that his beard was soaked with his own tears [24]. It is related also that Prophet Jesus [as] declared, "Blessed are you who weep now; you will laugh" [25]. Further, that the Holy Prophet [saw] said, "If you knew that which I know, you would laugh little and weep much" [26]. The truth is that sorrow inundates this existence. The worldly ones hide from sorrow by revelry and other material pleasures, but those of the spirit would penetrate all veils.

As one examines the reality of this world, one is led ever further along the paths of anguish. It may seem to those who are of limited perception, that such a one suffers from a sickness, which is named melancholy or depression. But those of wider comprehension will understand that melancholy is not a sickness, but the soul's response to the world. As immunogenic substances proliferate in our body when we are invaded by pathogens, so the soul responds with sadness to the poisons of the world. It is not by chance that we find depression as a common ailment in this age, and above all in prosperous materialistic societies. Sorrow is the natural response of a healthy soul to the illusory nature of worldly existence.

What is perhaps not appreciated by he who is in the condition of sorrow, is that depression is a gift from God, and that depression may guide the heart: "There befalls not any affliction but by the leave of God. And whosoever has faith in

God, He guides his heart." [Qur'ān 64.12]. As Al Ghazālī writes of the man of melancholy, "It does not occur to them [the worldly ones] that what has really happened is this: that the Almighty has a concern for the welfare of that man, and has therefore commanded His servants, the planets or the elements, to produce such a condition in him, that he may turn away from the world to his Maker" [27].

No human can approach God without first finding him or herself discontented with the world. Yea, God's messengers guide us to turn away from the world in sorrow, and surely they know the bleakness of our delusions. Prophet Abraham [as] said regarding the worship of world-objects, "I like not those that set" [Qur'ān 6.77], and even this great Muslim went so far as to proclaim, "If my Lord guide me not, I shall surely be of the people who go astray" [Qur'ān 6.78]. Yet on traversing the arduous paths of sorrow and disappointment, the servants of God find their destination in his words: "I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth" [Qur'ān 6.80]. That is to say, God manifests not only in the heavens of the heart but He also expresses Himself in the physicality of one's earthly existence. Thereafter, such a person is liberated from fear of the physical world, one arrives at certainty of faith, and henceforth no argument is possible: "Do you argue with me concerning God, when He has guided me aright?" [Qur'ān 6.81].

Therefore, it must be understood that sorrow is deeply connected to faith, and it is sorrow which drives us to God, as He says, "Those who have faith, and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. Aye! it is in the remembrance of God that hearts can find comfort" [Qur'ān 13.29]. However, this sorrow must be directed aptly. Prophet Muḥammad [saw] wept and admitted his sadness at the death of his beloved son Ibrāhīm, but he did so as an expression of his faculty of mercy, and in a way which pleased his Lord [28]. Contrast also the grief of Abū Bakr [ra] with the grief of the other companions, on learning of the demise of the Holy Prophet [saw]. This great *ṣādiq* (truthful one) strode fearlessly to the companions and uttered with inspired conviction, "whoever amongst you worshipped Muḥammad [saw], then Muḥammad [saw] is dead, but whoever worshipped God, God is alive and will never die." [29]. That is

to say, the sorrow of a truthful one, is the sorrow of a truthful one, who knows that God is Alive, and all else is subject to death. As it was said, "I like not those that set" [Qur'ān 6.77]. Therefore, the sorrow of a truthful person will always draw him closer to his Lord. Know this, that it is permissible to weep, and for the heart to be wounded; but the brow anointed with tears and blood must fall prostrate before God. Those who are afflicted with depression know that grief is akin to a powerful army, and the reality of melancholy is that one no longer derives comfort from a handsome face or melodious music or a starry night. For these are tokens of the world, and melancholy knows that its only remedy is to break free from love of the world. In this condition, the believer turns away from the world and finds comfort in God alone. And faith is that one should remain firm against the army of grief and remember God and prosper by the battle: "O ye who possess faith! when you encounter an army, remain firm, and remember God much that you may prosper." [Qur'ān 8.46]

CHAPTER SIX

The Seven Heavens

As suffering is integral to *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*, a common question asked by believers and disbelievers alike is, "Why do we find suffering in our existence?" All religions teach that God is Gracious, but this world He has created is ungracious. The answer to this paradox is found in God's Word as follows:

"Blessed is He... Who has created death and life that He might try you, which of you is best in deeds... Who has created seven heavens in harmony. No incongruity canst thou see in the creation of the Gracious God." [Qur'ān 67.2-4]

Elsewhere, God says that spiritual progress is attained by means of belief and by abandoning worldly pleasures and exerting oneself for the pleasure of God: "Those who believe and emigrate and strive in the cause of God" [Qur'ān 9.20]. The purpose of suffering is that it is a trial from God, which creates seven heavens in the heart. The evolution of the inward forms of the heart is dependent on suffering. Al Ghazālī holds that the corporeal body is a reflection of the spiritual heart [30], and indeed the Holy Qur'ān describes seven *khilaq* (manifestations of outward forms) and seven *akhlāq* (manifestations of inward forms). The seven *khilaq* are *ṭīn* (clay), *nuṭfah* (sperm), *'alaqah* (clot), *muḍghah* (shapeless lump), *'iẓām* (bones), *laḥm* (flesh) and *khalqan ākhar* (a final creation) [Qur'ān 23.13-15]. Correspondingly, God describes seven *akhlāq* which manifest the spiritual evolution of those who possess faith [Qur'ān 23.3-12].

The first of these is *khushū'* (lowliness or humility), as God says, "those who are humble in their prayer" [Qur'ān 23.3]. Prayer is an extension of facing God, for this reason we precede our prayer with the words "I turn my face in complete devotion to [God]..." [31]. That is to say, the first *khuluq* or spiritual form is that a person turns from the world and faces God, and the

natural consequence of facing God is that he is overawed by the Divine Majesty, and he enters a state of humility. The second *khuluq* is that he turns his back on the world, for he shuns all that is vain and worthless deviation from the path [Qur'ān 23.4]. In this state, he is not only humble during his prayer, but he fears God while engaged in his worldly affairs. That is to say, he is in the world but he continues to face towards God. The third state in the spiritual evolution of man is alluded to by "those who are active in paying the *zakāt*" [Qur'ān 23.5]. *Zakāt* (almsgiving) is one of the five pillars of Islām, and it is a methodology for returning to God. Here one does not only turn oneself towards God and avoid the trivialities of the world, but one actively makes sacrifices which purify one's self. The previous state was of negative virtue, but now one enters positive virtue and one's *khuluq* is of benefit to others. The fourth state is a very difficult matter, for it requires subjugation of primordial desire. *Zakāt* seeks to rein in avarice, which is motivated by excessive desire to promote one's worldly advancement. But the fourth state seeks to restrain the primordial desire which is called *shahwāniyya* (lust). God describes those who enter this state as guarding their *furūj* (sexual organs) [Qur'ān 23.6]. *Faraja ash shay* means he opened the thing and thereby allowed a breach, so that those who guard their *furūj* are those who allow no gaps in their chastity, that is to say they do not even approach sexual immorality. God says, "they restrain their eyes" [Qur'ān 24.31-2], meaning they permit no opening for entry of this sin. Again, this is a negative virtue of abstention, but it is accorded a higher station than *zakāt* because the desire which is conquered is of a higher order. It is one of the *shahwatayn* (two fundamental desires), and the "greatest of all desires" according to Al Ghazālī [32]. God tells us that even Prophet Joseph [as] was only able to conquer this desire on witnessing a "manifest sign" [Qur'ān 12.25]. Let nobody misunderstand God's frequent metaphorical allusions to *nisā'* (women) as examples of desired things, to mean that men are pure and women are somehow impure, for God says that *nisā'* are desired by both men and women [Qur'ān 3.15], and therefore the word *nisā'* is symbolic of worldly desires pertaining to all creation. At this stage, a person's faith enables him to resist even primordial desire in his quest for God's pleasure. The fifth *khuluq* is truthfulness and sincerity, and is described by God as

"they are watchful of their trusts and their covenants" [Qur'ān 23.9]. The Arabic word *rā'ūn* (watchful) means not only that they are truthful, but they scrupulously adhere to their obligations and promises to God and to man. On the one hand, they do not permit themselves the slightest deviation from truth. And on the other hand, they fulfil the requirements of truth not only in normal circumstances but also when sacrifice is required, for sacrifice is integral to obligations and promises. Remember this that it is "very difficult to become trustworthy and a person of integrity" [33], because truthfulness is only proven in the fire of sacrifice, and thus it is placed as one of the highest of the *akhlāq* or spiritual forms. It is reported that the Holy Prophet [saw] was compelled by his own truthfulness to return a Muslim refugee to the cruel hands of the disbelievers, in accordance with a covenant [34]. For when a believer enters the fifth spiritual form, then a covenant is firmly adhered to, and no compromise can be made in this matter. The Promised Messiah [as] writes that the fifth stage also implies sacrifice of the ego. He explains that as everything is granted on trust by God, then a faithful trustee is obliged to render everything back to God, and thus yield up the ego to Him [35]. This secret is revealed only to one who enjoys nearness to God. If we progress yet further in spiritual evolution, and we attain the sixth spiritual form, then God describes us as from amongst those who keep guard jealously in every way over their prayers [Qur'ān 23.10]. This means that God becomes the focus of one's life, so that nothing is permitted to interfere with one's relationship with the Divine. Neither externally will others nor internally will one's worldly desires cause such a person to deviate from perfect prayers. It is significant that in the first evolutionary form, God speaks of *ṣalāt* (prayer), but here in the sixth form He speaks of *ṣalawāt* (prayers). This may refer to the categories of prayer which are offered on the Threefold Path of the sūfis: formal prayer service on the First Step of *Sharī'ah* (Religious Law), nearness to God on the Second Step of *Ṭarīqah* (Mystical Path), and union with God on the Third Step of what is known as *Ḥaqīqah* (Reality) or *Ma'rifah* (Gnosis) or *Liqā'* (Communion) [36]. This is a vast subject, but briefly the Threefold Step may be understood as follows: *Sharī'ah* is "yours is yours, mine is mine", *Ṭarīqah* is "yours is yours, mine is yours too", and *Ma'rifah* is "there is neither mine nor yours, for we are one" [36]. *Ṣalawāt* may also refer to the fact that one offers

not only the obligatory prayer, but also the supererogatory prayers such as *nawafil* and *tahajjud*. It may also mean the repeated supplications of the beggar, as the Promised Messiah [as] explains, "When a beggar goes to someone and begs with humility and earnestness and does not move from his place, even after he is rebuked, and continues his supplication, then in the end the person supplicated is moved and bestows something on the beggar despite his miserliness. Then should not a supplicant have at least so much steadfastness as an ordinary beggar?" [37]. As this is the sixth state, and it is achieved after the state of truthfulness, then it may also signify that the entirety of one's internal worlds are now prostrated before God, so that they offer *ṣalawāt* instead of *ṣalāt*. Such a person may undergo hardships of the world, but he no longer experiences deprivation, because his attention is fully focused on the Reality of God. And the result is that the world does not conquer him, but rather his prayers conquer the world, as in the instance of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad [saw]: "It was the prayers during dark nights of one who had been wholly lost in God which created an uproar in the world and manifested such wonders as had appeared impossible in the case of that unlettered helpless one" [38]. The final and seventh spiritual form which may be achieved by those who truly seek is that one attains *Al Firdaus*, as God says, "they inherit *Al Firdaus*. They live therein." [Qur'ān 23.12]. *Al Firdaus* is the Loftiest Garden of Paradise, and for this reason it is the final state to which few indeed may aspire. Know that this is achieved not after death, but in this very life. For such a person, all suffering has now taken on illusory character because he is no longer only focused on God's Reality but now he is consumed by God's Reality. As a flame consumes the moth, so such a person ceases to exist in this world. He is in this world but he is not in this world. Rather, he is in *Al Firdaus* even before death, and suffering cannot touch *Al Firdaus*. Such a person has attained perfection, and the seven heavens shine forth in his heart, and God now says of him, "No incongruity canst thou see in the creation of the Gracious God." [Qur'ān 67.4]

An important point to note is that each person utters the prayer *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn* first and foremost as an individual, because the losses and sufferings mentioned are personal to each individual and therefore also the process of

returning to God is a personal experience. As God says, "no soul shall serve as a substitute for another soul at all, nor shall intercession be accepted for it" [Qur'ān 2.49]. The reason a believer says "we (plural) return to God" is because each believer holds a plurality of inner worlds within himself and a multitude of faculties. By saying "we (plural) return to God", the believer affirms that his faculties as a collective are moving towards God as a result of his suffering worldly loss. The words *ilaihi* mean "towards Him", and they do not necessarily mean that the believer arrives at God but at least the believer must be moving in the direction of God. It is the prophets whose inner faculties arrive at God so that they are His companions and achieve indomitable status: "Every prophet came alone into this world: he was alone, and yet he had a hundred unseen worlds within him. By his power he enchanted the macrocosm, he enfolded himself in a very small frame. The foolish deemed him to be lonely and weak: how is he weak who has become the King's companion? The foolish said, 'He is a man, nothing more': woe to him that reckons not of the end!" [39].

CHAPTER SEVEN

Two Deaths

It is a common misconception that we live and then we die. The truth is that we die and then we live. The Holy Qur'ān makes reference to two deaths and two lives: "Our Lord, Thou hast caused us to die twice, and Thou hast given us life twice..." [Qur'ān 40.12]. As we know that life in the Hereafter is eternal and nothing follows it, then it must be that death precedes life. This much is understood, that a person dies and then commences a new life hereafter. But what is the first death that precedes the first life in this world?

God's Word is that there is an equivalence between the first death/life and the second death/life, as God says, "Your creation [from first death to life] and your resurrection [from second death to life] are only like a single self" [Qur'ān 31.29]. The truth is that our creation here on earth originates with a sort of death. We begin when the male mingles with the female and a small mass is formed, and then our anatomical structures proceed to develop such as our spinal cord and our brain, and subsequently our hearts begin to beat and our lungs expand with our first breath. At some point during this process, we are guided to respond to our external environment and develop accordingly, and this functionally is the transition from death to life. Before this point, we are merely a mass of cells, though we carry the genetic imprint for development into something further, but we are dead. After this point, we are alive in that we are capable of response and development.

The second death/life follows the pattern of the first death/life. The Holy Qur'ān speaks of *barzakh* as a barrier which exists behind those who die the second death [Qur'ān 23.101], awaiting in that condition the Day of Judgment. The Promised Messiah [as] explains that they carry the potential spiritual imprint to develop into something further, but they are halted; almost as if in a state of suspended spiritual animation [40]. This condition endures until the Day of Reckoning, when God says

that He will be Aware of those who have died [Qur'ān 100.12]. This is not to say that He was ever unaware of us, but rather on that Day we become fully aware of God's Awareness, so that only on that Day we fully comprehend that He is Aware. After this point, we begin our second life. We are able to respond to our environment, be it heaven or hell, and develop accordingly. Again, awareness and development define life.

As we have previously observed, that there is no mention of any condition after the second life, which means that the second life is continuous development without an end-point, or else the end-point is outside of our own spiritual existence. The Holy Qur'ān says that *innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*, so that this continuous development is a progressive journey towards God. Thus even those who develop in the fires of hell, they are moving towards God, though this journey is one of affliction.

Nonetheless, there is something more which should be understood regarding the two deaths, which is that it is possible to bring forwards the process we have described. By the second death, we leave the physical life and enter a preparatory condition where we lose our physicality and ego. This prepares us for awareness of God, because undeniably a person cannot be fully aware of God while possessed by physicality and ego. We then proceed to enter an embryonic condition of spiritual awareness and development. But in the same way that yogis and fakirs may induce a near-death physical state where their hearts barely beat and they seem almost not to breathe and their metabolism slows to near cessation, there are also those people who are able to bring forward their second death and life. "They die before their death, and though they appear to be in this world, they in truth dwell in the other world" [18]. That is to say, they have no ego in this very world, achieve full awareness of God in this very world, enter heavenly development in this very world, and find God in this very world. For such people, the end of the first physical life is nigh meaningless: "And the trumpet will be blown and all who are in the heavens and who are in the earth will swoon, except those whom God will please." [Qur'ān 39.69]. The slaves of God are already in the second life even when they are amongst us in this world, therefore the trumpet which heralds the process of second death/life will not touch them.

"The truth is that until we submit ourselves to death, we cannot behold the Living God" [41].

CHAPTER EIGHT

Humility and the Needle

As God says that the journey of the seven heavens begins with lowliness, so we should seek to understand what is the path of humility and what are its benefits. This path can be known through contemplation of God's Word, in the way of the Imām Mahdi. The Messiah of our age attained God's most sublime blessing [Qur'ān 4.70] by declaring, "I am nothing and possess nothing" [42]. Thus he is the Imām to be followed in the ways of humility, being himself the one amongst Muslims who most successfully found obedience to God and His Messenger.

Every person contemplates the glory of the Sun, but it is in the shadows that the secret of humility is found: "Have they not observed, bowing in humility before God, that the shadows of everything which God has created shift from the right and the left, and they are being humbled?" [Qur'ān 16.49]. Humans should reflect on their transience, and that they are all in the late afternoon of existence, and the shadow of their glory is indeed declining.

Humility is required before God will deliver us from this world. It is not true that those who are stranded in the deserts of this material world are excluded from Divine grace if they tread the path of humility; nor is it true that those who are blessed with the oceans of Divine favour may function without humility. The Holy Prophet [saw] is commanded to ask, "Who delivers you from the calamities of the land and the sea, [when] you call upon Him in humility and in secret... ?" [Qur'ān 6.64]. Humility is the beginning of one's journey, and it remains the beginning, from whichever point we turn towards God. That is to say, we never abandon this precious commodity, and we carry it with us wheresoever we go in whichsoever state we find ourselves. *Al hamdu lillāh* is for both the land and sea of our souls.

Let no person despair of meeting God, if he can but acquire the precious flowing waters of humility. God says it is humility

which may cause streams to gush forth even from hearts of stone [Qur'ān 2.75]. For humility inclines a person to patience and prayer, and brings Divine succour, as God explains, "And seek help with patience and prayer, and this indeed is hard save for the humble in spirit" [Qur'ān 2.46]. Humility can be won if one establishes God's Truth in one's heart and gives it precedence over one's own desires: "And if the Truth had followed their desires, verily the heavens and the earth and whosoever is therein would have been corrupted"; "... It is the Truth from thy Lord, so that they may believe therein and their hearts may be humble unto Him"; "Truth has come and falsehood has vanished" [Qur'ān 23.72, 22.55, 17.82]. The Promised Messiah [as] writes, "Remember that arrogance is allied to falsehood" [43].

It should be remembered that arrogance is the genesis of sins, for it is intimately interwoven with *kufr* (denial of God) and *shirk* (the worship of gods other than God). We find these twin roots of arrogance in a few sparse words from the Imām Mahdi and Promised Messiah [as]: "Such a one worships no God, he only worships himself" [44].

Every fire which refuses to bow prostrate before clay is arrogance, and Iblīs (Satan) was the first to manifest arrogance. That is because fire burns proudly, but clay is humble dust mixed with the waters of God. So Iblīs said, "[I refused to submit to Adam because] I am better than he. Thou hast created me of fire, while him Thou has created of clay." [Qur'ān 7.13].

The heart of an arrogant person is unable to utter the words, "The praise is for God", which describe the spiritual quest of the Muslim. Then how can such a person approach God? The response to such an unfortunate one is, "Leave [My presence]; thou art certainly of those who are abased" [Qur'ān 7.14].

The abasement of Iblīs should be pondered, for it is a warning unto us. "Who now can remain safe from Allāh after Satan by committing a similar disobedience?" [45]. It is an ignorant person who deems that God removed Iblīs from His presence, but that God would not do thus to others who are likewise culpable.

Moreover, arrogance is of such a powerful and subtle influence, that no human should underestimate the danger. It is fallacious that arrogance exerts its hold only on the sinners, but rather arrogance awaits in hiding even for those who seek God. Remember this, that Iblīs is not in some distant infernal netherworld, but rather he seeks to ambush us on the very straight path that leads to God [Qur'ān 7.17]. And at whichever stage we stand on that path, we will find him in front of us, behind us, to our right and to our left [Qur'ān 7.18]. Even the person who is standing on that path may find himself following Iblīs by arrogance into hell, and thus far from God's Love: "Surely, God loves not the arrogant and the boastful" [Qur'ān 4.37].

The Promised Messiah [as], who was auspicious by his humility, and who attained spiritual elevation thereby, explains that the arrogant person takes pride in his intelligence, not knowing that it is a gift from God, and he praises his own handsomeness, not knowing that the praise is for God [46]. He attributes beauty to his own deeds and accomplishments, and these beguile him so that he is unmindful that God is The Beautiful. "Those who believe not in the Hereafter, We have made their deeds [appear] beautiful to them, so they wander blindly" [Qur'ān 27.5]. That is to say, the braggart who boasts that he achieved this and he achieved that, is giving excessive importance to this world, and the Hereafter does not exist in his heart.

Not only does such an unfortunate person forget the Hereafter, but the reality of his malaise is far more grievous. It is found on contemplation, that arrogance rears up when a person forgets God and focuses instead on his perceived superiority over others. Iblīs's arrogance became manifest in the matter of Prophet Adam [as]. For this reason, the Promised Messiah [as] emphasises that a Muslim should not look down on his brother, as Iblīs looked down on Prophet Adam [as]. Being himself the chosen one of God, yet the Promised Messiah [as] says, "I do not prefer myself to others in the slightest degree" [47]. He explains further that arrogance cannot exist in the presence of God [48]. For this reason, we opine that arrogance is rooted in *kufr*. That unfortunate person covers up the Divine, and so the Promised Messiah [as] tells us, "Such a one worships no God" [44].

Arrogance is rooted also in *shirk*, and Pharaoh was the second to manifest arrogance. *Sharaka* is to share or participate with one in the ownership of something, and *shirk* describes those who believe in a plurality of gods, but in a subtle manner it manifests also in those who arrogate divinity to themselves; thus the Promised Messiah [as] declares that the arrogant one "worships only himself" [44]. God tells us, "Verily, Pharaoh behaved arrogantly in the earth... And Pharaoh said, 'O chiefs, I know of no god for you other than myself, so... build me a tower, that I may have a look at the God of Moses...'" [Qur'ān 28.5,39]. Such misguided persons feign to possess the keys of heavenly life and death, saying, "You have believed in him before I gave you leave?" [Qur'ān 26.50]. For this reason, Prophet Abraham [as] told the king, "My Lord is He Who gives life and causes death" [Qur'ān 2.259]. Alas, the king was wrapped up in worldly concepts of life and death. It should be remembered that the *mushrikīn* (worshipers of other than God) include not only those who say openly, "I am God", but also those who speak these words in hidden ways. As the Holy Prophet [saw] warns, "I fear for my people *shirk* and the hidden desire" [49]. A Muslim may commit *shirk* by performing deeds for the admiration of his fellows, rather than for the pleasure of God. A Muslim may also commit *shirk* by taking on the mantle of God and making pronouncements on the spiritual condition of others. Such a person deems himself incapable of error and often rejects the truth, and is heedless of admonition. "Pride is disdaining the truth out of self-conceit and contempt for the people." [50].

The beauty of humility is that it conquers arrogance, and thereby draws the Love of God to the humble one. For ego is a veil over the heart which seeks a reality, and God's Love cannot exist save as a reality. Remember always that God's Love is free from the illusion and transience which oft characterise worldly love. Do not seek it by the paths of worldly love. You will be thwarted.

But for he who seeks to purify himself, only Divine Love may establish humility in the heart. As the Promised Messiah [as] explains, "[low qualities] continue to be expelled till the last of them is left which is arrogance. It can be expelled only through

Divine grace, which is won through sincere striving and supplications" [51].

We are dust, and even that dust is created by God. We are clay, and even that clay is permeated by the waters of God. We are worthy that the angels should prostrate before us, and even this after God's Spirit enters us. That is to say, we are nothing, and God is Everything. Then how may we enjoy a relationship with the *Ḥaqq* (Truth, God) if we think ourselves to be worthy of praise and strut proudly like the camel? Only humility can cure the arrogance of the camel, so that he becomes small and may pass through what must be passed through. And only thus, may we establish a relationship with the *Ḥaqq*. This may transpire in our first life, or in our afterlife, but it must be undertaken on the journey of *ilaihi rāji'ūn*. God says accordingly, "Those who reject our Signs and turn away from them with disdain, the gates of [spiritual] firmament will not be opened for them, nor will they enter heaven until a camel goes through the eye of a needle" [Qur'ān 7.41].

At this point, we may inquire what is the relationship of humility with the Flower of Faith? What should be understood, is that humility lies at the first step and at the last step of the path of those who believe and have faith. It is not only at the initial stage of lowliness or *khushū'*, but also at the final stage of *Al Firdaus* whereat a person's ego is consumed by God's flame. Humility irrigates the stem, but it also blooms forth in the bud and each fragrant petal.

In this connection, know that *īmān* (faith, belief) is neither tangible, nor simple to define. At one end of the spectrum of faith is found negativity on the precepts of arrogance: "Evil is that which your faith enjoins on you, if you are believers" [Qur'ān 2.94]. At the other end of the spectrum is found God and the manifestations of His reality [Qur'ān 2.286]. Furthermore, as God is *Al Kabīr* (The Incomparably Great), therefore the ship of the believer's soul will never find the limits of its destination. "[God is]... The Manifest and The Hidden" [Qur'ān 57.4]. That is to say, for the ship which sails on the oceans of faith, something of God will be always Manifest and something will remain Hidden.

Īmān is a flower which sprouts from fertile soil, is irrigated by Divine rain, and grows upwards towards heaven. "Heavy rain falls on it so that it brings forth its fruit twofold" [Qur'ān 2.266]; "like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches [reach] into heaven" [Qur'ān 14.25]. It undergoes an eternal process of evolution and development, with this difference from earthly flowers that *īmān* need not die, but by contrast may continue to ascend through states of knowledge of its Lord: "Surely, thy latter state is better for thee than thy former" [Qur'ān 93.5].

Īmān begins its journey in *al ghaib* (the unseen), and for this reason God begins His Book by saying, "It guides... those who believe in the unseen" [Qur'ān 2.4]. God and His angels and the prophets and the Book are not fully discerned at the commencement of the voyage. "And with [God] are the keys of the unseen; none knows them but He" [Qur'ān 6.60].

In the following verses, we find illustrated the relationship between faith and the unseen:

"Who believe in the unseen and observe prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee, and that which was revealed before thee, and they have certainty regarding the Hereafter." [Qur'ān 2.4-5]
"And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them but He. And He knows whatsoever is in the land and the sea. And there falls not a leaf but He knows it; nor is there a grain in the deep darkness of the earth, nor anything green or dry, but is in a clear book." [Qur'ān 6.60].

The meaning of these verses is that faith is granted to the humble one through God's grace. The Promised Messiah [as] himself explains that salvation is attained only through Divine grace [52]. The seed of faith is planted by God Himself, and He may do so in the arid plains of ignorance or where Divine waters are abundant, saying, "And He knows whatsoever is in the land and the sea" [Qur'ān 6.60]. The Flower's vitality is evidenced by two essential components. Firstly, the stem draws up heavenly waters from where they have fallen and other Divine nutrients and thus nourishes the flower, without which it

would die, and this is "and they observe prayer" [Qur'ān 2.4]. And secondly, the bud provides nectar for the honey bee and the petals dazzle the eye and also they afford shade to God's creatures, and this is "and they spend out of what We have provided" [Qur'ān 2.4]. But the Flower is ever in need of the grace of God, otherwise the process of spiritual decay is inevitable, so "there falls not a leaf but He knows it" [Qur'ān 6.60]; for it is God Who plants the seed, and it is God Who continues to develop it, saying, "and there is not a grain in the deep darkness of the earth" [Qur'ān 6.60].

Īmān then continues to flourish or die... "and not anything green or dry" [Qur'ān 6.60] by humble devotion or else arrogant rejection before whatever descends from heaven in the now or in the past, as God says, "And those who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee" [Qur'ān 2.5]. But as this process endures, so something beautiful happens. All that has been described, is written in a clear book [Qur'ān 6.60] and it leads finally to *yaqīn* (firm faith, certainty). For God describes the latter stage of this process as "they have certainty regarding the Hereafter" [Qur'ān 2.5]. The Promised Messiah [as] explains that there are three levels of *yaqīn*: (1) *'ilmul yaqīn* (knowledge through deduction), (2) *'ainul yaqīn* (knowledge through observation), and (3) *ḥaqqul yaqīn* (knowledge through personal experience of the absolute truth of a thing). [53]. Therefore, even as *īmān* (faith) is an evolving experience, so also *yaqīn* (certainty) continues developing within the latter stage of *īmān*, until at the latter stage of the latter stage, the believer acquires *ḥaqqul yaqīn* of the Hereafter. This signifies that he experiences the Hereafter in this very life, as the Promised Messiah [as] explains, "a person who has attained salvation is bestowed a heavenly life in this world" [54].

Because faith is entirely in the gift and knowledge of God, it is a grave offense against God that we should make pronouncements on the faith of a specific person. For this reason, it is discouraged that we should attribute purity to ourselves or to our fellows [Qur'ān 4.50, 53.33]. A person who discards arrogance and embraces humility can never commit this despicable act, that by himself and without the authority of God he should cut open the hearts of his fellows. Even the

messengers know not the responses of the hearts to the message they convey [Qur'ān 5.110]. Know this that faith is in the gift of the Master, and it is not for the slave to attribute it to himself or to others. This was understood by Prophet Jesus [as], who was the Messiah for his people, and yet he pronounced emphatically, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" [55]. As God alone comprehends the condition of the Flower, so He admonishes us not to arrogate His capacities to ourselves: "So ascribe not purity to yourselves. He [God] knows him best who is righteous" [Qur'ān 53.33]; "Would you acquaint God with your faith, while God knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, and God knows all things full well?" [Qur'ān 49.17].

Having examined at length the woes of arrogance and the contentment of humility, remember this that humility's most beautiful jewel is that one is blessed with meeting one's Lord. As arrogance cannot exist in the presence of God, so also humility brings one into His presence: "... the humble ones, who know that they are meeting their Lord, and they are in the process of returning to Him" [Qur'ān 2.46-7]. There is a *ḥaqqul yaqīn* with regard to the Hereafter, but there is also a *ḥaqqul yaqīn* with regard to God Himself. Towards this certainty, Islām calls us by the methodology of humility. Islām has many meanings: peace, submission, obedience, and more. The question, "What is Islām?" has been discussed much by scholars, and so God sent His Mahdi to guide us. And our Imām has taught us that Islām is humility:

What is Islām? [It is] to die for God,
And forsake all desires of the self for His pleasure.

Those who embraced death are those who will live forever;
Life is not attained in this path but through the humble acceptance of death.

Audacity and arrogance are of Satan the accursed;
The true progeny of Adam are humble.

O worm of this earth! Give up arrogance and pride,
For Pride is appropriate to the Glorious Lord alone.

Consider yourselves as [of] worse [condition] than all;
Perhaps by this you enter the Court of Lord God.

Relinquish pride and arrogance, for thereby alone is found righteousness;
Be humble as dust, [for] therein lies the Lord's pleasure.

The root of righteousness is humility for the sake of God;
Virtue, which is the condition of Faith, lies entirely in righteousness. [56]

CHAPTER NINE

Justice

Al ḥamdu lillāh reveals another aspect of "Surely, we are from God and surely towards Him we return", which is that these words are founded on justice. As the heavens and the earth would not exist without principles which sustain them, so God's spiritual universe would not exist without the fundamental principle of justice. God does not advise us to praise Him as a favour, but rather He says *Al ḥamdu lillāh*, that praise belongs to Him. Thus we do not abandon the world as a favour to God, but rather it is our spiritual obligation to return to our Creator. God explains this further when He bears witness that there is none to worship except Himself and thus He maintains justice [Qur'ān 3.19]. Thus the concept of justice is tied to the worship of God. How many of us feel indebted to our parents and kindred, and feel guilty when we do not follow even their ungodly desires. How many of us are moved by either the wealth or poverty of our fellows, to act in their favour for themselves, rather than for God. But how few of us cast even a cursory glance in the direction of returning to the One Who created the ones we feel indebted to, and Who is the source of all wealth. God tells us that these false loves are based on our love for our own egos, and that our low desires of attachment will keep us from acting with justice to God and to His creation. As He says, "O ye who believe, be strict in observing justice [to God and to His creation], witnesses who belong to God, even against your own souls, or parents or kindred. Whether he be rich or poor, God is more mindful of them both. Therefore follow not low desires that you may act equitably, and if you hide [the truth] or evade [the obligation], then God is Aware of what you do" [Qur'ān 4.136]. There is too much depth in these words for us to properly address their significance here, but we can find traces of their wisdom in Prophet Buddha [as]'s core concept that all evil and sorrow is from attachment to the world [57]. The sun and the moon and the stars were created by God, and therefore they adore God [Qur'ān 22.19]. We alone reject the natural movement of the universe toward God, and

we suffer as a weak miserable fish suffers when it struggles upstream against a powerful river. This is because justice flows in the direction of God, and away from worldly attachment. Love of the things of this world is founded on falsehood and falsehood is perishable, as God says, "Verily, falsehood is bound to vanish" [Qur'ān 17.82]. For this reason, such ān unfortunate fish is destroyed in this world as well as in the next world. But again, it must be understood that *al qist* (justice) is not only a worldly injunction. Its kernel is in the soul, and it extends out to the body as rays of light extend out from the sun. That is to say, the origin of justice has little to do with the matters of this world. Rather, true justice is the worship of God alone and the return to Him alone. This matter is made abundantly clear by our Creator: "Say, 'My Lord has enjoined justice. And fix your attention aright at every place of worship and call upon Him, making yourselves sincere towards Him in religion. As He brought you into being, so shall you return [to Him]'" [Qur'ān 7.30]. Justice is in fact found on the path of truth, and it reflects our love for the *Ḥaqq*. The man who does not eschew falsehood and ardently pursue truth, how can he return to God? For God is Truth.

From this perspective, it is evident that the worship of God is the natural condition of humankind, as we observe that the natural condition of a fish is that it should swim downstream. God says, "And I have not created the *jinn* and the men but that they may worship Me" [Qur'ān 51.57]. Those with atheistic tendencies take great exception to the idea that they are created only for the worship of God. This is because the depth of God's claim is not duly appreciated by them. A person who is gifted with insight will observe that the purpose of any created object is derived by specificity and by sublimity. For example, the purpose of a pen is to write, and this is for two reasons. Firstly, because other created objects do not write and the pen does write, and this is its specificity. Secondly, because the highest function which the pen can perform is to write, and in this resides the sublimity of the pen. It is certainly possible that one should employ a pen for all sorts of other objectives, but its natural purpose is known by specificity and sublimity. Similarly, a human may engage in diverse activities which are performed by other animal species. It is known that chimpanzees possess cognitive skills and the ability to make simple tools. Dolphins

have a highly developed cortex, and demonstrate advanced intellectual capabilities such as self-awareness, language, and creativity. Admittedly, humankind is blessed with intellectual faculties of a higher order; but we do not find specificity and sublimity to the fullest extent in these faculties. On the contrary, those who have worshiped God as He should be worshiped testify that experience of the Divine is the loftiest function of humankind. Perhaps the Atheists misunderstand what is the meaning of the Arabic word *'ibādah* (worship, self-enslavement, love). This means that the lover devotes himself in such a way that he loses his own identity in the Beloved, and discovers thereby something within himself which is higher than his self. *'Ibādah* is as if a musician picks up an instrument, a painter takes hold of a brush, a poet writes his first sonnet; but more so. For God is that Creator for Whom the musician, the painter and the poet yearn, and they turn to music, painting and poetry but as a thwarted lover turns to others than his Beloved. Alas, their error was this, that they sought to hear God and see God and write God, as if God were a sound or a picture or a composition of their own fancy. Let the Atheists know this, that God is the Creator, and He cannot be attained by the efforts of a created object. How may a finite object perceive an Infinity? Rather, it is God's Graciousness that He reveals Himself to the heart of the believer, for a finite object abides ever within the ambit of Infinity. That is to say, "He is the Incomprehensible, the All-Aware" [Qur'ān 6.104].

Now the question arises, that if the rightly directed path is the path away from love of the world and towards love of God, then why and by what process do the prophets and saints love those other than God? The answer is that they love always through God, and their love reflects the Love of God. Prophet Krishna [as] explains, "whatever in this world is excellent and glows with intelligence or beauty, be sure that it has its source in a fragment of My divine splendour" [58]. Similarly, the Holy Prophet [saw] says, "God is Beautiful, He loves all beauty" [59]. The Promised Messiah [as] eulogises God thus: "The love-laden glances of a beautiful face remind us ever of You. Every curly lock [of hair] points its finger in Your direction" [60]. And Ibn al 'Arabī explains, "in [His creation], God has brought together all perfection and all beauty... The whole universe offers up its prayers to Him, falls down before Him, and sings His praises. All

tongues speak of Him alone, and Him alone all hearts desire... If it were not so, no messenger and no prophet would ever have loved woman or child." [61]. In other words, the prophets are fully cognizant of God's Beauty, and so they also perceive the traces of His Beauty in all His created objects. In other words, Beauty engenders love. Nevertheless, the illusory nature of our earthly existence is also affirmed, for God says that this world and its objects are as a "palace paved smooth with slabs of glass" under which water runs [Qur'ān 27.45]. That is to say, the Divine presence is found flowing with life under every beautiful world-object, but we should not mistake that beauty to be itself the Divine. By realisation of this reality, the Queen of Sheba was moved to submit herself fully to the Lord of the worlds.

However, this is not an easy matter to achieve. From a thousand men, only one may seek it. And from a thousand who seek it, only one may learn the path. And from a thousand who learn the path, only one may find the courage to pursue it and then follow it faithfully. God has described this path as the *'Aqabah* (Steep Ascent), because it is akin to climbing a mountain [Qur'ān 90.13]. The believer advances up the mountain path, but he is pulled back and downwards by the gravitational force of worldly desires, and these continue to attract him until at last he reaches the summit of the mountain. Then at this stage, he is again assailed by the world, as Prophet Buddha [as] was tempted by Māra (The Evil One) on the brink of his attainment of Enlightenment. At this stage, he has tremendous potential energy and Māra desires strongly to cause him to fall back into the abyss of worldly love [62]. But if this challenge is overcome, then the believer enters a new blissful state which is described by God as *nafsi mutmainnah* (the soul at rest). The Promised Messiah [as] explains that now the potential energy of the believer is such that, "As water flowing down from a height, on account of its volume and the absence of any obstruction, rushes with great force, in the same way the soul at rest flows towards God." [63]. This is the true culmination of *innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*, and thus it is at this stage that God says, "return thou to thy Lord" [Qur'ān 89.29].

Each person possesses the capacity to attain this height to a different degree, and God describes four realms of different

heights [Qur'ān 4.70], but within these four realms there are a plenitude of dimensions. It is as if at each step on the Steep Ascent, one is penetrating a veil within oneself which separates the seeker from God. Even the prophets arrived at different stages of proximity to God, and only the Seal of the Prophets Muḥammad [saw] was enabled to penetrate all veils so that he moved beyond the heavens and reached further than the Angel Gabriel, and finally he beheld the very Essence of God [64]. This was the unveiling of God in its perfect manifestation, so that nothing stood between God and the Holy Prophet [saw]. For him, it is said that when he threw, it was God Who threw [Qur'ān 8.18], and that his hand was veritably as the hand of God [Qur'ān 48.11]. But all those who move in his direction, that is to say on the *ṣirāṭ al mustaqīm*, become to some degree imbued with that quality of Godliness. For when a human returns to God, then nothing remains except God; and therefore the journey towards God is the annihilation of one's humanity in favour of Divinity. "I (God) become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks... " [65]. Finity cannot exist in the presence of Infinity; and so at this stage, only God exists [66].

CHAPTER TEN

Perfect Understanding

Now the question may be asked that how can we advance upon the *'Aqabah* which is an uphill struggle, and this is the highest form of spiritual *jihād*. The Promised Messiah [as] explains that only perfect understanding of God enables a person to discard the sins of this world. This perfect understanding is a higher form of devotion than mere professed belief, because it is established only with perfect love and perfect fear of God [67]. If we ponder further, then we find that contemplation of God's core attributes leads us to this same conclusion. Perfect understanding of God is only achieved when we know that "Every physical and spiritual power is bestowed by Him" [68], and so we devote all our outer and inner worlds to this endeavour, and He is our *Rabbil ālamīn*. Perfect love is based on God's *raḥmāniyyat* and *raḥīmiyyat*, and perfect fear is derived from His status as *Māliki Yaumuddīn*. But this *Yaumuddīn* (Day of Judgment) is not some distant future event of conjectural value for the person with perfect fear. Rather, it is an absolute certainty which exists in this very life. Every day is a *Yaumuddīn* for such a person, for he fears always that he may be deprived of God. It is love and fear which lead a person to proclaim, "Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we beseech for help," and it is this same love and fear which hinge him firmly on the *ṣirāṭ al mustaqīm* (straight path). The sūfīs describe a similar concept by a similitude that the believer is a bird with two wings of hope and fear, flying straight towards its destination. If one wing fails, then it cannot attain its purpose [69]. Thus if one perfects love and fear, then the toiling believer will gain wings and fly towards God and his path will be made easy. It should be understood that the beautiful fear of God is different from the common sort of fear, as the person who fears a thing flees from it, but the person who fears God flees towards Him [70]. In fact, if we examine *Māliki Yaumuddīn*, we find it is a reflection of *Ar Raḥmān* and *Ar Raḥīm*, and if we examine fear of God, we find it is a reflection of love for God. For "one of the signs of true love is that it is a

part of the nature of a true lover that he is fearful of his beloved cutting asunder from him, and considers himself lost if he commits the slightest default" [71]. Who is more fearful of whom, than the lover is fearful of his *Ma'shūq* (Beloved)? But such Love is only attained when God is the Lord of our external and internal worlds.

It should be kept in mind that perfect understanding cannot be achieved solely by our efforts. Indeed, our efforts are as nothing in comparison with our dependence on the favour of God when we toil on the Steep Ascent. This is the reason that God reminds us that He is *Ar Raḥmān* before He is *Ar Raḥīm*, and also that our first words to Him are "Thee alone we worship and Thee alone we implore for help". In fact, the journey of *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn* is the journey from Origin to Destination, from First to Last, being both Manifest and Hidden. God alludes to this when He says, "He [God] is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has full knowledge of all things" [Qur'ān 57.4]. That is to say, knowledge resides with God alone, and therefore perfect understanding is taught by Him alone. As He is the First Who creates us and the Last to Whom we return, so on this journey some aspects of His Being are made Manifest and others remain Hidden. God is the One Who reveals to His servants what He wills, according to their capacity, as He says, "This is the Book. There is no doubt in it. [It is] a guidance for the righteous" [Qur'ān 2.3]. For this reason, there are the jurists who are assiduous in study of the exoteric law of God, and there are the sūfis who delve deep into the esoteric law of God. Thus the Manifest and the Hidden are reflected in the external and internal aspects of our Love for God. It is also true that *tawakkul* (trust in God) is linked to belief in *Al Bāṭin* (the Hidden One). Therefrom the bright light of faith bursts forth. Prophet Lao Tzu [as] tells us, "Tao is hidden, yet it shines in every corner of the universe" [72].

Finding perfect understanding of God, moving through the Manifest and the Hidden, we end by finding Love; this is evidenced repeatedly by God's Word itself, as well as by the exposition of His chosen ones. It should be reflected on that every chapter of the Holy Qur'ān begins with the verse, "In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Ever Merciful". Thus

God's Love envelopes always the chapter that follows. The Holy Prophet [saw] promises us that God's Mercy overpowers His anger [20], and he manifests God's Love in his own person as a mercy to the worlds [Qur'ān 21.108]. Similarly, the Promised Messiah [as] explains that "The basic attribute of God Almighty is Love and Mercy and that is the mother of all attributes" [73]. It is the lover who declares, "Shall I seek a lord other than God, while He is the Lord of all things?" [Qur'ān 6.165], and it is the Beloved of Whom it is said, "He has power over all things" [Qur'ān 11.5]. For the Beloved always possesses power over all things with regard to the lover.

Knowing this, then all words of God must be interpreted in the light of God's Absolute Love. There are those who have perverted God's Message by forgetfulness or wilful disregard for God's basic attribute. If we entertained hope that such perverters would appreciate our question, we would ask them: what are words? God says only that the Holy Qur'ān is in clear eloquent Arabic that we may understand [Qur'ān 43.4]. But *Al Kitāb* (The Book) which guides the righteous is something more than words. *Dhālikal Kitāb* (This is that Book) [Qur'ān 2.3]! How glorious a statement. The Promised Messiah [as] opens the secrets of the Divine Message: "By using the word 'that', which denotes distance, God Almighty has indicated that this Book derives from the knowledge of that Being... Whose perfect knowledge and profound mysteries are very far from the limits of human sight" [74]. The Holy Qur'ān is not mere words. For this reason, God says that it is replete with similitude [Qur'ān 17.90, 18.55, 39.28]. Sūrah al Fātiḥah is at once the delicate beauty of the rose, and the roar of the lion, and seven claps of thunder [75]. *Al Kauthar* is the fountain of eternal blessings bestowed on the Holy Prophet [saw] [Qur'ān 108.2]. The wives of the Holy Prophet [saw] are those enlightened souls tied to him, from whom the believers draw sustenance just as children imbibe milk from their spiritual mothers [Qur'ān 33.7, 31-34]. The moon is the power of Arabia [Qur'ān 54.2]. The stars are the brothers of Prophet Joseph [as] [Qur'ān 12.5]. The invading kings are angels who cause disorder to the ego of the believer [Qur'ān 27.35] [76]. The slabs of glass are deceptive world-objects which veil the Divine Essence [Qur'ān 27.45]. Again, the Holy Qur'ān is not mere words. The Holy Qur'ān is rhythms, waves, particles, shapes, pictures, objects, realities. And it is

not even that. The Holy Qur'ān is God, clothed in words; but why are we so obsessed with the cloth? We should have regard always for What lies beneath.

But this requires a condition that is very difficult to obtain and which may elude the greatest academics of Madīna and Al Azhar, and this condition is *taqwa* (righteousness) and enduring passion for the kernel of the kernel of God's Word. The Promised Messiah [as] says that the Holy Qur'ān is a rare pearl, it is light, it is fruits, it is more beautiful than a hundred thousand Josephs [77]. A physician should love that Book more than his patients, a teacher should be more fond of it than his most intelligent students. One who is away from that Book should be an orphan, a lost and forlorn lover, in poverty. And when he is with that Book, then he finds shelter, he is guided and enriched. This was given in the first place to the Holy Prophet [saw]. God says to him, "Did [God] not find thee an orphan and give shelter? And He found thee wandering in search [for Him] and guided thee [unto Himself]. And He found thee in want and enriched thee." [Qur'ān 93.7-9]. But God's most generous Messenger is always willing to share what he has acquired. As far as one moves towards his point of love for the Holy Qur'ān, so one is blessed by hearing with the ears of the Holy Qur'ān, seeing with the eyes of the Holy Qur'ān, moving when the Holy Qur'ān moves, and falling still when the Holy Qur'ān is still. This is why Aīsha [ra] said of the Holy Prophet [saw] that his character was the Qur'ān [78]. And this is why a person's mind may read the Holy Qur'ān, but it is his heart that will open its secrets.

Remember this that any interpretation of God's Word which contradicts His fundamental attribute of Love must be rejected as false and baseless. It is as if the perverters were worshipping two gods [Qur'ān 16.52]. He is One, and He permits no such incongruity.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Falsehood

We have already explained that God is Truth, and therefore the return to God must be by the path of truth. Then what is the fate of those who deny truth?

Oft misunderstood is the relationship between the Creator and the created. On reflection, it is found that the created must return to the Creator, willingly or unwillingly. Imām ʿAlī [ra] says, "In Thy hand [God] is the forelock of every creature and to Thee is the return of every living being" [79]. Regarding the disbelievers, it is promised that God will gather them also to Himself [Qur'ān 4.173]. That is to say, He will gather them to The *Ḥaqq*.

In the end, those who deny truth in this life, will be obliged to face Truth in the Hereafter. This much may be surmised by the following: "And if thou couldst only see when they are made to stand before their Lord. He will say, 'Is this not The Truth?'" [Qur'ān 6.31].

A famous American playwright once opined, "Hell is yourself" [80]. For the disbelievers, certainly this is accepted. In this regard, it should be understood that hell is the natural consequence of a diseased spiritual state; suffering is inflicted not by an external agency, but by a pathology of the disbeliever's self [81]. As a person with diabetes suffers from impaired bloodflow, so the disbeliever's spiritual vascular system is unable to carry nutrients to where they are needed for good health. The disbeliever is often heedless of his own condition, in the same way that diabetic peripheral neuropathy renders one insensitive to pain, and so the sufferer repeatedly damages his self. As the Promised Messiah [as] warns us, the result is that "the [damaged] limb becomes unable to perform its allotted [spiritual] function and if it is neglected it gradually becomes useless or becomes infected and falls away" [82].

Note that this is not to say that hell is somehow outside of God's sovereignty: "We do not deny that torment is God's action, but it is the consequence of man's actions, as when a person swallows poison, God kills him" [83].

The Day of Judgment is nothing less than the manifestation of the reality of one's self. In the world, it is possible for the *kāfir* (one who covers up) to cover up the ugliness of his spiritual reality by worldly joys and wealth. He may take hallucinogenic or other chemical substances, or turn to carnal pleasures, or he may oppress his brother, in an effort to hide from his own deprived condition. But all such veils upon veils shall be as skins upon skins, burnt away by The Truth: "As often as their skins are burnt up, We shall give them in exchange other skins that they may continue to taste the punishment" [Qur'ān 4.57]; "And if thou couldst only see when they are made to stand before the Fire!... that which they used to conceal before has now become clear to them" [Qur'ān 6.28-9]. Hell is seen always with the "eye of certainty" [Qur'ān 102.8], and so Truth is inevitable even for the disbelievers. Imām 'Alī [ra] admonishes us, "What will you do when the coverings of this world in which you are wrapped are removed from you?" [84].

Indeed, God tells us that His punishment and the Hour are both phenomenae by which the disbelievers will be truthful, and call only on God. In response to this call, God will remove the false idols from their hearts through the curative fires of hell [Qur'ān 6.41-2]. But this is a painful ordeal, and the process of purification is that the disbeliever must know the truth of himself.

The Promised Messiah [as] explains, "the condition of a person after death is nothing new" [85]. This is the illuminating principle which he derives from God's words "He who is blind in this life shall be blind in the Hereafter" [Qur'ān 17.73]. Know that the Hereafter is not a new experience, but rather it is the tangible and full manifestation of a person's spiritual reality, which he covers up in this life by means of his physicality. That person lives his first creation in this world, and the scribes write the story as he lives it. "Its impress is inscribed upon the heart," affirms the Promised Messiah [as] [86]. Then God rolls up the scroll and repeats his creation in the Hereafter on the basis

of what is written on the scroll in his first life. As God says, "The day when We shall roll up the heavens like the rolling up of written scrolls. As We began the first creation, so shall We repeat it." [Qur'ān 21.105]. That is to say, there is a second creation of man, and the second creation is the creation of Truth.

The Islamic philosophy of hell is both comprehensive and tremendously profound [87], and describes a journey from falsehood to Truth. *Kafara* (to cover up) is that the disbelievers fold themselves up in order to hide from The Truth of God [Qur'ān 11.6]. But the book shall be laid wide open on the Day of Decision [Qur'ān 17.14]; the veil of this world will be removed [Qur'ān 50.23], and hell will be made manifest [Qur'ān 31.17, 79.37]. In other words, the disbelievers shall see the truth of their own spiritual condition [Qur'ān 19.39]. How is this so, that the physicality of a person vanishes, and the impress of his spirituality persists? The Promised Messiah [as] answers, "Human actions are preserved and recorded as sound is recorded in a gramophone" [88]. In our age, digital technology stores information in a form which is not tangible and yet which is capable of manifesting itself as a new reality. This being within the ken of human invention, so surely the Hereafter is within Divine means.

Then God will say, "Speak not unto Me" [Qur'ān 23.109], meaning that The Truth has no relationship with those hearts which are fettered by the deception of ego. Hell is God's absence [Qur'ān 83.16-17]; it is also abhorrence for the self [Qur'ān 40.11]. This self-abhorrence will cause an inflammatory reaction against the pathogens that infect the soul. A flame will engulf the self and strip away ego-veil after ego-veil from between the disbeliever's heart and The Truth of God [Qur'ān 70.16-17]. Not one destruction, but many destructions shall be required in this expurgatory process [Qur'ān 25.15].

Thus the egos will be humbled and the disbelievers will plea to God for help, and they will be helped with water of intense heat that will burn away their impurities. As they will now have turned their faces towards God, so this water will begin by burning clean their faces [Qur'ān 18.30].

Is there a way out? [Qur'ān 40.12-13] Hell is a mother for the disbelievers [Qur'ān 101.10], and in her womb shall they develop from one stage to another [Qur'ān 84.20]. Also the disbelievers are a fuel for hell [Qur'ān 21.99], which ignites and purifies and is itself burnt up into nothingness. From both these Qur'ānic insights, we learn that each soul will be expelled from its mother-hell as a new purified creation. For how can they finally disbelieve, when the return must be to God, and by hard labouring they will meet Him? [Qur'ān 2.29, 84.7]. Thus the ego will at last be destroyed; as God says He will break the mountains into pieces and scatter them [Qur'ān 20.106]. Then, and only then, the erstwhile disbeliever will approach the Gracious God as a slave. For "There is none in the heavens and the earth but he shall come to the Gracious [God] as a slave" [Qur'ān 19.94].

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Last Chapters

Innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn provides one of the manifold keys for unlocking the enigma of the last chapters of God's Word. The Chapter of Al Ikhlās is the greatest of these chapters, for it fosters attachment to God by inculcating true knowledge of the Unity of God. As one cannot move towards God without knowledge of His Unity, so *ilaihi rāji'ūn* is not possible without Al Ikhlās. We are taught to proclaim that God is the One and the *Ṣamad*, that is to say the Unique Entity Who is besought of all [Qur'ān 112.2-3]. Here we find an echo of our situation and our purpose, described by God as *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*. There is One Origin, and we have departed from it, therefore we must seek it. *Tauhīd* (Unity) inculcates trust in God, for there is only One Destination and One on Whom we can rely. Then we are taught, *lam yalid wa lam yūlad*, that God does not beget children, nor is He begotten [Qur'ān 112.4]. That is to say, there are two fundamental loves of worldly nature. Firstly, there is the child's love for its parents which is founded in some part on worldly dependence and in some part on gratitude. Secondly, there is the paternal or maternal affection which pulls a person towards a helpless child, and this surges as a natural instinct which is not founded on gratitude. Other relationships of love are in some way or other reflections of these two forms of love. As we often seek to understand our relationship with God by means of our limited experience, we may mistakenly infer that *innā lillāhi* forms the basis of filial love and *innā ilaihi rāji'ūn* is the source of parental love. For this reason, God asserts that He does not beget and He is not begotten. Thus those few who love God as He should be loved, do not love Him in the fashion of a child or a father. They do not love Him because they hope for some sustenance or wish to sustain Him. Such is not their motivation. They love Him for Him, and this love is unlike all worldly relationships. For the true *muḥibb* (lover), God's very existence is their motivation. Then God says *wa lam yaku(n) llahū kufuwan ahad* (and there is not even one partner for Him)

[Qur'ān 112.5]. The word *yaku(n)* means there never was, is not, and never will be a thing like unto Him. Here God says that His Unity exists outside of Time. Thus we understand that *innā lillāhi* and *innā ilaihi raji'ūn* do not refer to a journey in Time, but rather to a journey in essence. Our essence is from God, and its rightful Destination is God. If we are from God and we move towards God, and if God exists outside of Time, then our movement also must function outside of Time. God futher says that not even one partner is available for the dependence of humans, and therefore we cannot originate from or return to any other. In fact, our worldly existence is an illusion, for worldliness is to set up partners with God, and partners with God do not exist, therefore the worldly existence does not exist. This is the meaning of *Al Ikhlās* (The Sincerity), which is to turn towards God uniquely and with no selfish motivation. True *Ikhlās* is not possible while the world exists in the heart of the believer.

The Chapter of Al Falaq enjoins us to seek refuge in the Lord of the *Falaq* (dawn). *Falaq* refers to both *innā lillāhi* and *innā ilaihi raji'ūn*. Dawn is spiritual light, which shines when we belong to God. Then we leave the Reality of God, and we enter a dark period of illusory worldliness. Then we encounter utter spiritual desolation, and we seek refuge from the world by the words *min sharri mā khalaq* (from the evil of what He has created) [Qur'ān 113.3]. Then we are rescued in the hours of deepest darkness by the Holy Spirit, which descends in the *Lailat il Qadr* (Night of Power) [Qur'ān 97.2]. The Promised Messiah [as] explains that *Lailat ul Qadr* is the darkest hour, when it seems that the night envelops the universe in its unbreakable grip [89]. As God says, we seek refuge "from the evil of darkness when it overspreads" [Qur'ān 113.4], and it seems that all is lost, and only in this condition is the Power and Majesty of God demonstrated by breaking the unbreakable, and for this reason it is named the Night of Power. And then a second manifestation of *Falaq* shines forth when we return to God. But this journey is arduous and littered with hazards, for this reason we are taught repeatedly to seek refuge. God's protection is sought from *sharri n-naffāthāti fil 'uqad*, which is the evil of those who spit poison and blow on the knots which bind the believer to God. And from *sharri ḥāsidin idhā ḥasad*, that is to say Iblīs who envies man's nearness to God.

An Nās is the final Chapter of God's Word, and admonishes we who have departed from God that we must return towards Him, because He is our *Rabb* (Lord), *Malik* (King) and *Ilāh* (God). *Rabb* means one who sustains and develops and brings to perfection by degrees, therefore obedience is due to him [90]. Thus *shukr* (gratitude) begins our journey towards God. *Malik* signifies a king or master who possesses absolute dominion over a thing, as it is said *malaka ash shay* (he owned the thing and could do with it what he liked). This is the second step towards God, which is the step of *tawakkul* and demands complete trust in the Master. Finally *Ilāh* is the object of adoration, and this is the ultimate step where the believer transforms into an *'āshiq* (lover) of God. Although gratitude and trust ignite the spark of faith, but the flame of adoration consumes the believer and now God is loved for God. *Jinn* describes hidden qualities of fiery nature [Qur'ān 15.28], and *nās* alludes to fluctuating qualities of hasty nature [Qur'ān 21.38]. As both the *jinn* and the *nās* are subjugated in the final Chapter by seeking the protection of God, now the lover is elevated to the supreme rank of God's slave: "And I have not created the *jinn* and the men but that they may enslave themselves to Me" [Qur'ān 51.57]. It is only at this final stage that one confidently enjoys protection from Satan who whispers into the very hearts of men. For as another than God can be a *rabb*, then Satan can assume the guise of *rabb*. And as is the same with *malik*, so Satan can take on the garb of *malik*. But there is no *Ilāh* except God.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Thankfulness

In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Ever Merciful.

Before we proceed to examine in depth the meanings of *shukr* beyond its normal translation as "thankfulness", we shall avail the opportunity to present a rare pearl from the gemstones of the Holy Qur'ān. The pearl is found placed within what is surely a most comprehensive Divine revelation:

"Verily, God enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others, and giving like kindred" [Qur'ān 16.91].

The Promised Messiah [as] describes this pearl with breathtaking spiritual genius. For the sign of the master is that his disciples require two or three or a multitude of verses to be guided, whereas the master finds the same knowledge encapsulated in a single verse or even a single word of Divine provenance. We acknowledge unreservedly that the spiritual master of our age is the Promised Messiah [as]. Let our compatriots in Islām run to the fountains of other scholars, but they will find that the waters of those will never taste so sweet, and in many cases have already run dry. God does not send an Imām but that there is a necessity.

This is the insight of the Promised Messiah [as] : *'adl* (justice) is *shukr* or thankfulness; *iḥsān* (goodness to others) is *tawakkul* or trust; and *ītā'i dhil qurbā* (giving like kindred) is *'ishq* or Love [91]. Thus we find the entirety of the path of *īmān* embedded in these few sparse words of God. The Promised Messiah [as] explains that *'adl* signifies obedience to God which is "an expression of gratitude for His favours" [92]. This means that the servant recognises his Lord has favoured him, and hence he obeys God, which is nothing else than the condition which is also described as *shukr* (thankfulness). The Promised Messiah [as] then reminds us that the Holy Prophet [saw] himself describes *iḥsān* as that state where a Muslim conceives of God's presence

[93]. That is to say, the believer "views the favours of God Almighty clearly without the least obstruction resulting from associating means with the Benefactor"; and further, he "does not contemplate [God] as being absent but conceives Him as being present" [94]. Here, *iḥsān* means that a person no longer functions as if God is sometimes present and giving him provision, and sometimes absent and denying him, but instead he always sees God's beneficent presence in every aspect of his own existence; and this is our concept of *tawakkul* or trust in God. Finally, the Promised Messiah [as] reveals that *ītā'i dhil qurbā* is the climactic stage of "personal love", where the beneficiary is "filled with delight like a true lover's" [95]. Needless to say, this is what is known in Islamic terminology as *'ishq* (intensity of love) or *maḥabbat* (pervasive love). That is to say, this fragment from a single verse describes Thankfulness, Trust and Love as three progressive stages of Faith.

Turning specifically to *shukr*, we find that the normal understanding of this word is that a person acknowledges a favour from a benefactor, speaks largely of it, behaves so as to please the benefactor, and avoids what displeases the same. That is to say, *shukr* is authenticated by the heart and the tongue and the hand.

Nevertheless, there is another dimension to *shukr* which is not so simple to fathom. This derives from God's attribute of *Ash Shakūr* (The Appreciative), He Who epitomises *shukr* in its fullest sense [Qur'ān 35.31]. Elsewhere, God says that He is *Shākir* or appreciative of good deeds [Qur'ān 2.159]. If *Ash Shakūr* exemplifies the perfection of *shukr*, and if we know that He is not grateful for any favours rendered to Him, since it is not possible for the created object to favour Him, then it follows that the perfection of *shukr* is not to acknowledge a favour, but rather to respond to goodness and for oneself to be augmented thereby.

From this regard, we see that *shukr* has less to do with being favoured, but rather its importance resides in that it comprises a methodology to augment oneself: "And whosoever is grateful, is grateful for the good of his self" [Qur'ān 27.41]. The common understanding is that one performs *shukr* in return for a favour. But here God says that *shukr* is for the further benefit

of one who has already been benefited by favour. This is to be pondered, because it alters entirely our perspective on the purpose and effect of *shukr*. For instance, we appreciate differently the Divine command, "Aye! worship God and be thou among the grateful" [Qur'ān 39.67]. This means that thankfulness flows from the fountain of worship and cannot be separated from worship. But it also alludes to the ennobling quality of *shukr*. That is to say, by *'ibādah* (worship, slavehood), the thankful person recognises God's beneficence and is augmented thereby. In other words, *shukr* comprises a reward or profit for the one who worships. For this reason, God speaks first of worship and then of *shukr* as a consequence of worship, rather than first of *shukr* and then of worship as a consequence of *shukr*. This insight may be difficult to grasp for the common man, but herein we find expressed the nobility of slavehood to God.

It is noteworthy also that as *kufr* means to cover up, so the Arabic lexicons opine that *shukr* may be etymologically derived by transposition from *kashr*, meaning to uncover or expose to view [96]. This signifies that the *shākir* uncovers the ego-veil which prevents his heart from acknowledging God's beneficence, in the same way that the *kāfir* covers his heart beneath that same ego-veil. By this means, we see that as thankfulness forms the beginning of the path of *īmān*, so also ingratitude commences the path of *kufr*. For this reason, Iblīs especially mentions of those whom he will seduce, that they will be those who are not thankful [Qur'ān 7.18].

Furthermore, God says, "And He is not pleased with ingratitude in His servants. But if you are grateful, He likes it in you" [Qur'ān 39.8]. This means that in *shukr* lies no less than the pleasure of God. An urgent question, therefore, is how one may establish *shukr* in the heart and so begin one's journey on the path of *īmān*. A correct methodology for the evolution of *shukr* is found in the following verses:

"Give thanks to Me and to thy parents" [Qur'ān 31.15]

"Thy Lord has commanded, 'Worship ye none but Him, and goodness towards the parents'." [Qur'ān 17.24]

A point of note is that *shukr* (thankfulness) should begin with the worship of God, which is to say within one's internal worlds, and then it extends outwards to parents and the external worlds. Furthermore, we see that *shukr* comprises of two alloys which meld into one: thankfulness to the Creator, and thankfulness to the created. The Holy Prophet [saw] explains that these two are intimately connected, and he goes so far as to equate ingratitude towards people with ingratitude towards God [97]. For God is the Origin of all favours, and ingratitude to a benefactor reverts always to the Source of all beneficence.

Regarding thankfulness towards God, this is the natural first consequence of turning one's face in the direction of God, for which reason *shukr* is situated near the beginnings of *īmān* or Faith. As the believer progresses through the realms of *shukr*, he finds himself in a constant state of gratitude towards his Benefactor. He may lose his physical faculties and his worldly possessions, but he will never express or even experience dissatisfaction with his Lord. Nay, even his *shukr* will intensify by these manifest trials. "How is this possible?" asks the disbeliever. This question is because the disbeliever does not comprehend that his own ingratitude stems from imperfect awareness and from errors in attribution.

In the first place, the disbeliever is ungrateful because he lacks perfect awareness of God's bounties. "And truly thy Lord is gracious to humankind, but most of them are not grateful" [Qur'ān 27.74]. God's blessings to His creation include that He gives ears and eyes and hearts, but "Little thanks do you give!" [Qur'ān 32.10]. By contrast, *īmān* is that a person loses one eye, and he praises God for the other eye; because his focus is on God's favours, and so he is ever mindful of God's beneficence, and so his *shukr* continues to accrue. This evolution in *shukr* knows no limits, as God's beneficence is itself without limits: "And if you count the favours of God, you will not be able to number them" [Qur'ān 16.19].

In the second place, the disbeliever is not thankful because he attributes love in error to world-objects. He gives his own pleasure more importance than the pleasure of God, and so he fails to advance in faith when deprived or dispossessed of some earthly advantage. By contrast, the believer loses his dearest

world-object, and thereby proclaims, "And sufficient is God as a Friend" [Qur'ān 4.46]. But God does not suffice the ungrateful person, who seeks the earth and its pleasures. The tragedy is that such a person is finally abandoned by the very world-objects he covets, and so the world itself teaches ingratitude to the disbeliever: "Beware, this world attracts and then turns away... It disowns and is ungrateful. It is malicious and abandons [its lovers]" [98].

Notwithstanding that ingratitude is pervasive in humankind, yet God's flawless systems of Love are designed to pull even unfaithful lovers towards the Beloved. Know this that God has counselled children to be gentle with their parents, but He never admonishes parents in this same way. This is because He has created nurture and gentleness within the kernel of parenthood. By contrast, thanklessness is oft epitomised by the child, and God has created in the progenitor a necessary capacity for forgiveness and generosity which stands firm before the onslaught. The progenitor knows Love, whereas the child rarely manifests God to this high degree. Here we refer to those spiritual progenitors who are known as God's messengers, and other religious luminaries who guide from death to life, as a mother gives birth to her child from the death of her womb. Frequently in physical parenthood, and even moreso in spiritual parenthood, the progenitor's Love enables even a faithless child to develop the delight of thankfulness; as God says, "Repel with that which is best. And lo, he between whom and thyself was enmity will become as though he were a warm friend" [Qur'ān 41.35]. This transformation from enmity to friendship, from death to life, from disbelief to faith, begins with *shukr* on the part of the spiritual child.

In conclusion, let us turn our attention to a metaphor which further illuminates the place of *shukr* on the believer's path:

"And thou seest the ships therein ploughing [the waves] that you may seek of His bounty, and that you may be thankful." [Qur'ān 35.13]

Note that a similitude is unlocked by the concepts that lend substance to the words in which it is clad. That is to say, its secret is attained by penetration beyond garb and into essence.

Bearing this in mind, we find that the essence of a ship is that it comprises a vehicle, also that it provides protection, furthermore that it moves on the surface of the ocean, lastly that it leads to a desired objective. In other words, *shukr* is where a person embarks on a journey towards God, and is sheltered from the tumult of the ocean, and is therefore grateful; but the person may enjoy only a shallow relationship with the Divine, which is not fully submerged, because the bond is dependent on God exhibiting His mercy. Evidently, in and as of itself, this Thankfulness is an unsatisfactory condition which does not befit the noble capacities endowed us by our Creator. The believer must therefore press onwards, and seek two further spiritual forms which shall be described in the following chapters. Briefly here, we foresee that the believer should progress to a condition known as *tawakkul* or Trust, which is that a person falls from the ship into the raging ocean, and continues to have faith in Divine Providence. Then subsequently the believer may be transformed by *maḥabbat* or Love into an ardent devotee of God, which is that a person dives wilfully into the ocean; upon which there is no turning back, there is drowning of the self in God's waters, there is acceptance of death, there is then gnosis, and there is bestowal of a new life thereby. It should be understood that the secret lies not only in words, nor simply in essence, but also in what lies outside of that essence. A thing is known both by what it is and by what it is yet not. For this reason, our contemplation of Thankfulness must develop inescapably to consideration of Trust and Love.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Trust and the Fire

The renowned Persian physician and philosopher Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariya Al Rāzī opines that three soul types must be harmonised in the person who seeks God: the rational divine soul, the irascible animal soul, and the vegetative appetitive soul [99]. These three when properly developed may be described as Wisdom, Courage and Temperance. Wisdom is further manifested as knowledge of the path of return to God, Courage is to turn one's face to that path, and Temperance is to pursue that path with patience and contentment. However, *tawakkul* (perfect trust and faith in Divine power and knowledge) underlies all these three. For the wisdom of humans is inherently deficient, and so *taqwa* (righteousness) is only comprehensively attained by those who believe in *al ghaib* (the unseen) [Qur'ān 2.3-4]. That is to say, the path is never fully known to humans, and courage is to face an unknown path, and temperance is to follow that unknown path faithfully. These three processes therefore demand *tawakkul*.

Most importantly, *tawakkul* describes a relationship with God: "And put thy trust in God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian. God has not made for any man two hearts in his breast..." [Qur'ān 33.4-5]. That is to say, a person attains *tawakkul* when his one heart embraces God, and there exists no second heart to embrace another. An unfaithful person does not simply abandon God in times of distress and sorrow, but rather his heart turns to another god. The *mutawakkil* possesses only one heart, and it is devoted to God alone, so that he is left with no option but to place his trust in God, even on the occasion of some loss or other mishap. For this reason, God follows by saying that, "God speaks the truth" [Qur'ān 33.5]. This means that man's one heart is the truth, and all other hearts are deception. Herein we find the essence of *tawakkul*.

Know this that *tawakkul* is not only trust in God as we trust in our most trustworthy friend, but it is something entirely of a

different order. *Tawakkul* is derived from faith in *Al Qādir* (The All-Powerful God) and in *Al Alīm* (The All-Knowing God), as we say *Fa innaka taqdiru wa lā aqdiru, wa ta'lamu wa lā a'lamu* (For surely You have power and I am powerless, and You have knowledge and I am ignorant" [100]. As no other can claim to possess these qualities of absolute power and knowledge, so *tawakkul* exists only in relation to God. Those such as Al Ghazālī, who ponder deeply man's relationship with God, understand this subtle point that *tawakkul* is naturally tied to God's Unity [101]. A person appreciates that there is One Who is *Al Qādir* and *Al Alīm*, and he ceases to act or know for himself, but rather resigns himself to the will of God. In truth, the end-point of *tawakkul* is the same as the end-point of *Tauhīd* or Unity: it is *ma'rifa* (gnosis). But know this that resignation to the pleasure of God is not to passively accept, but rather it is to actively embrace His pleasure. Having attained gnosis, the *mutawakkil* ceases to bow down beneath the weight of God's will, and instead he rises up into God's will. The Holy Prophet [saw] explains that the believer is like a plant whose leaves move in the direction of the wind and yet he stands up straight [102].

A question which is worthy of examination is this: what is the relationship between *tawakkul* and the Fire of God's punishment? *Tawakkul* is to embrace the Fire, as all that is apportioned by God is good. It is understood by the *mutawakkil* (he who trusts) that the Fire is only an expression of Divine mercy. As God says, "Know that God is severe in punishment and that God is *Ghafūr* (Who covers up our sins) and *Raḥīm* (Who rewards our spiritual struggle)" [Qur'ān 5.99]. That is to say, the very same God Who punishes us is described as One Who covers our faults and extends mercy to us. It follows that God's punishment of His slaves [Qur'ān 5.119] is an unperceived manifestation of His mercy, and the believers do not lose heart at the time of hardship; they believe in the hidden reality which is known as *al ghaib*. The consequence of this belief should not be taken lightly; by God's grace, it is something which possesses the power to warp the fabric of world-reality, so that one finds peace in the tumult, joy in despair, loftiness in abasement, and coolness in the Fire. Thus it was that God said, "O fire, be thou a means of coolness and safety for Abraham!" [Qur'ān 21.70].

Here, in the Fire, we find that *tawakkul* is allied to the concept of *ṣabr* (patience). The Holy Qur'ān clearly enunciates the linkage between patience and trust: "Those who are patient and put their trust in their Lord" [Qur'ān 16.43, 29.60]. In truth, we may speak of a fluid mechanics of Faith, as all these concepts are somewhat fluid in their interaction. For instance, *ṣabr* in its lowest manifestations finds expression as *muṣtabir* or *mutaṣabbir* [103], where a person begins on the path of bearing afflictions with difficulty for his Lord. This is of a lesser value than the highest manifestations of *shukr*, where a believer goes so far as to thank his Creator for tribulation. However, the realm of *ṣabr* also includes *ṣabūr* and *ṣabbār*, which denote an intense degree of patience, and which approximate to Love in spiritual eminence. Therefore patience is found before Thankfulness and throughout Trust and also within Love; it is global, and for this reason God has declared that it is the *ṣābirīn* (patient ones) who say, "Surely, we are from God and surely towards Him we return" [Qur'ān 2.156-7]. The word *ṣābirīn* includes all the abovementioned conditions of *ṣabr*, as a person returns ever closer towards his Lord; no believer can lie outside the circumference of this circle. Having understood that *ṣabr* is found in all stages of *īmān*, we shall nevertheless describe it at its juncture with *tawakkul* for purposes of clarity.

The Holy Qur'ān often speaks of belief and good actions as twins who are coupled together in the spiritual development of the Muslim; one cannot flourish without the other. In the matter of *ṣabr* also, these two are linked, by God speaking of those who are patient in consonance with those who both believe and do good works [Qur'ān 28.81]. Here, it may be stated that belief is passive and good deeds are active. By passive, we do not advocate that belief means a person should be lifeless and unresponsive, but rather that the believer first looks within himself, and thereby receives the impression of God upon his heart. It is only after God enters the passive and submissive heart, that good actions issue forth and God thenceforth manifests actively in the believer. This philosophy permeates Islām, and so there is also the passive and the active within *ṣabr*.

Intrinsic to most interpretations of *ṣabr* is the idea of suffering an affliction without complaint, the Arabic word *ṣabir* denoting a bitter medicine. The passive component of this is that a person should not feel aggrieved at his suffering. A wise teacher who lived on a mountain near Aretxabaleta, in the Basque Country, counseled me in my youth: "If your problem has a solution, then do what you can. But if there is no solution, then there is no problem, and you should accept it". For the person who attains the status of *ṣabūr*, this acceptance becomes a continuum of existence. *Ṣabr* is to patiently bear what must be borne, and what lies outside of one's sphere of influence, without a murmur of protestation. It is also to make one's best effort to accomplish a desired objective, and then to leave the result to God. However, what is little understood is that the *ṣabūr* continues to exhibit *ṣabr* even when he achieves an objective. This is because, for he who seeks the reality of God, there is a trial in the good things of this world. Success and failure both engender *ṣabr*, for they are two impostors of this world. The *ṣābirīn* say, "surely from God we originate and surely towards Him we return" by relinquishing attachment to worldly comforts such as security, food, wealth, lives and fruits [Qur'ān 2.156-7]. Similarly, Ramaḍān is known as *shahru aṣ-ṣabr* (the month of patience) because it demands self-restraint from wholesome provisions of this world. Therefore, the passivity of *ṣabr* for the believer is that he bears an affliction patiently, but at its highest stage of *ṣabūr*, he endures those earthly pleasures in which others find joy. The height of *shukr* is that a person is grateful for affliction from God; and the height of *ṣabr* is that he is patient in affluence from God. This perfection of *shukr* and *ṣabr* is a natural evolution towards Love.

Active *ṣabr* is that the mentality of the *ṣābir* is transformed into a person's deeds. Here, the believer does not care so much for consequences, but rather he does what is pleasing to God. *Ṣabr* is a methodology for action, which can yield results far in excess of the *ṣābir*'s efforts. For when a supplicant prostrates himself on God's threshold, saying, "I am patient by love of You, and so I ask You this," then such a prayer is often heard. For this reason, God says that the believer is patient and then he prays [Qur'ān 2.46, 2.154], rather than that he prays and then he is patient for the acceptance of his prayer. Prayer

before patience would give importance to the believer's personal desires; which is why patience should be before prayer. Patience should advisably precede prayer and indeed all actions.

Regarding the relationship between *ṣabr* and external actions, Islām also makes a distinction between the *ṣabr* of the disempowered and the *ṣabr* of the empowered. The first is where a person is oppressed, and lacks the means to repel oppression lawfully. For such a person, his *ṣabr* is that he does not turn to unlawful means, and instead he bears patiently the cruelty of his persecutors, and prays to his Lord to deliver him, and does not lose faith. There is great merit in this, and it distinguishes the believer from the non-believer; for the believer always turns to God when he is troubled, and the non-believer turns frequently to the world for succour. The second type of *ṣabr* is that a person exercises forbearance when he is offended by the misdemeanour of an opponent, while possessing the means to punish the miscreant [Qur'ān 16.127-8]. God refers to this as *lamin 'azmil umūr* or "from matters of a very strong resolve" [Qur'ān 42.44], paying tribute to the believer who exhibits a spiritual power which overcomes his physical power.

A very lovely description of the *ṣābir* is that "he was content to perish for gaining the approval of him whom he loved" [104]. That is to say, the zenith of *ṣabr* is that a person is willing to give up his life, and this forms a bridge-point between Trust and Love; for it is the lover who can more properly be described as embracing death. We find this in the prodigious words of Prophet Ishmael [as], who prepared for slaughter at the hands of his father, avowing, "Thou wilt find me, if God pleases, of those who are patient" [Qur'ān 37.103]. Here we find the possibility of a different application of *inshā' Allāh* (if God pleases). Normally this is taken to mean that Prophet Ishmael [as] would be patient if God wished it to happen that he should be patient. However, an alternative understanding is that Prophet Ishmael [as] affirmed that, if it were God's pleasure that he should die, then he would be patient in the face of death. *Ṣabr* in its most sublime manifestation is that one should offer one's life for God's pleasure.

The etymology of the word *ṣabr* yields further insights into this spiritual condition [105]. *Ṣabarahu* means he confined or restrained him, also that he confined him until he died, and *maṣbūr* means to be put to death; so that *ṣabartu nafsī* means "I confined my ego until it perished", conveying that a person restrains his desires until they die and all that remains is God's desire: "And you desire not, except that God, the Lord of the worlds desires" [Qur'ān 81.30]. *Ṣabīr* signifies a mountain, and *ṣibārah* are hard stones which are worn smooth. Herein blossoms the idea that a believer's worldly attachments are whittled away by the afflictions of this world, which gradually increase his awareness of the illusory nature of earthly pleasures, and so finally he is reworked into a smooth plain stone, upon which the impress of God may take shape.

"How great is their endurance of the Fire!" [Qur'ān 2.176] reveals further spiritual verities with respect to *ṣabr*. God mentions those whose worldly attachments cause them to follow error and reject guidance, and declares that they are in a state of *ṣabr* with regard to the Fire. That is to say, there is a *ṣabr* of the trials of this world, but there is also a *ṣabr* of the Fire in the next world; this latter *ṣabr* is derived from attachment to earthly pleasures, as God says that the one who chooses the life of this world will reside in the Fire [Qur'an 79.39-40]. Moreover, since we are advised to prefer the Hereafter over the present life [Qur'ān 9.38], and since the next world is a spiritual reality and this world is nothing but an illusory enjoyment [Qur'ān 3.186], then the reality of *ṣabr* is that it is related to the Fire of worldly attachments. Therefore for those who have achieved spiritual death of the ego and have already arrived in the next world before physical death, their *ṣabr* is altered from the *ṣabr* of the common man. For the *bashar* (common man), *ṣabr* is to patiently endure the removal of his worldly pleasures. For the *insān al kāmil* (perfect man), *ṣabr* is to patiently endure worldly pleasures, because his trial subsists in the pleasures themselves, not in their confiscation. The *bashar* is preoccupied with loss of the world-objects which afford him pleasure, but the *insān al kāmil* engages himself in breaking the attachments which link those world-objects to his *nafs* (soul). If this idea is difficult to grasp, then we may understand the *bashar* as saying, "I have lost this world-object, and I am suffering, but I will not complain because this loss

was in the way of God"; whereas the *insān al kāmil* says, "I do not attribute value to any pleasure outside of God". For this reason, the Holy Prophet [saw] says that for the believer, this world is a prison [106]; the believer's *ṣabr* is not because he is deprived of world-objects, but rather his very existence in this world is a trial. For this reason also, God's name is *Aṣ-Ṣabūr* (The Perfectly Patient), because He does not attach value to earthly pleasures, saying, "That which is with God is better and more lasting" [Qur'ān 42.37]. This philosophy leads also to the affirmation that those who encourage *ṣabr* and *ḥaqq* (truth) will finally achieve a state where they are no longer in a state of loss [Qur'ān 103.3-4]. The perfection of *ṣabr* is something else than suffering. This is how God does not suffer loss, yet He is *Aṣ-Ṣabūr*.

Another interpretation of *ṣabr* is that "he made no difference between a state of ease, comfort and affluence, and a state of affliction; preserving calmness of mind in both states" [107]. This reminds us again of *tawakkul*, where a person's one heart is faithful to God in both of two conditions. In fact, it is the *ṣabūr* who severs worldly attachments, and thereby attains the one heart of the *mutawakkil*.

Having understood something of the synergy which exists between *ṣabr* and *tawakkul*, one may ask how to develop this second stage of Faith. In truth, we should ask how to return to *tawakkul*, for *tawakkul* is our natural state. We observe that a very young infant will trust strangers and play even with lion cubs fearlessly. This is because God Himself has nurtured perfectly the infant in its earliest development, and the memory of this is fresh in the young child's mind. Only the world and untruth of its inhabitants teach a child later to distrust. One path of return to *tawakkul* is that of *dhikr* (remembrance and contemplation) of God's attributes and His countless favours. Another path is that of experience and reflection. As the same child learns through experience and reflection that his loving mother will punish him only to protect him from harm, thus such a person will establish even a higher degree of trust in God. "His trust in what is with God is more than his trust in what he himself has," and this evidences the truth of his faith [108]. *Tawakkul* then takes on two meanings for the fortunate one who acquires it. Firstly, it completes Wisdom, Courage and

Temperance, and thus enables the *mutawakkil* to tread the path towards God. And secondly, it nourishes and protects Love for God. For the absence of trust kills the flower of Love more surely than the most severe drought, and Love blossoms always in the presence of *tawakkul*.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Love

Love of God lies at the root of *innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*, as we observe that a person always travels towards the one he loves. A person will journey even thousands of miles and face all manner of hardships smilingly for the purpose of being at the side of his beloved, and he will never willingly abandon his beloved. Therefore the return to God, which is otherwise an arduous task, can be rendered easy and irrefutable, but for this purpose one must have God as his Beloved. The Promised Messiah [as] says that "perfect faith... should create a lover's restlessness in the heart" [109]. Al Ghazālī tells us, "The purpose... is to cut the love of this world away from the soul and to set firmly therein the love of God, so that one would love nothing so much as the meeting with Him" [110]. Al Shibli affirms that Love by definition obliterates from the heart everything except the Beloved [111]. Fire purifies a precious metal of all impurities, and Love for God similarly purifies a soul of worldly desires; and "he indeed prospers [in the pursuit of God's Love] who purifies it" [Qur'ān 91.10], for God is the One Whose Beneficence requites more than the Love of even His most ardent admirer. However, Love itself has its own components, and the perfection of Love depends on the perfection of its components: *riḍā'* (satisfaction), *shauq* (longing), and *uns* (fellowship) [112]. The perfection of these is in itself a tremendous challenge. Rābia al-Adawiyya, who was of those enamoured of God, understood that the perfect Love is one which is derived not from fear of Hell, nor from desire of Paradise, but rather it is Love of God, for God, in God [113]. Few may appreciate this, and even fewer acquire it, but it is a manifestation of "is God not sufficient for His servant?" [Qur'ān 39.37].

The Arabic word *istiqāmah* (perseverance, steadfastness on a straight path) describes the lover's unwavering determination to attain the pleasure of God. The root letters Q, W and M lend a fascinating array of meanings to the word *istiqāmah* [114].

Qāma bil layli means he rose in the night to pray, and *qāma bil 'amr* is that he attended to the affair diligently and constantly. *Qawwamahu* signifies that he made straight a crooked thing, and *qāwamahu* signifies that he rose against him and opposed him in contention. *'Aqāma* is that a person duly observed and performed a religious or moral obligation; *'aqāmahu 'alā aṭ-ṭarīq* means that he made him keep to the right path. *Muqīm* is translated as lasting, continuing, unceasing [Qur'ān 9.21]. Therefore the root letters carry connotations of a continued unstinting effort to oppose what is crooked within oneself and adopt a straight path to some intensely desired objective. In other words, these letters portray Love for God. Furthermore, the Arabic *hajar mutaqawwim* (precious stone) suggests that by Love, the smooth stones of *ṣabr* are transmutated into the diamonds of *istiqāmah*. That is to say, the stone is made precious by *istiqāmah*, which thus is the finer evolution of *ṣabr*. The word *istiqāma* itself means that he went on, undeviatingly.

Know this that *istiqāmah* is a rare and wonderful spiritual quality. We are indeed fortunate if we have witnessed it in a person ourselves, for it is found only in those who do not deviate an iota from God's commands and prohibitions. The reward of this is God Himself, as the Promised Messiah [as] writes: "It is true that steadfastness is more than a miracle. Perfect steadfastness is that one should find oneself surrounded on all sides by calamities and one should find one's life and honour in danger and nothing comforting should be available, so much so, that God Almighty should stop – by way of trial – the comforting visions and dreams and revelation and should leave one in the midst of terrifying fears, but that at such a time, one should not abandon courage and should not step back like a coward and should not let one's fidelity be weakened. One's sincerity and loyalty should not be shaken, one should be pleased with the humiliation, one should be reconciled to death, one should not await the support of a friend, one should not seek glad tidings from God, because of one's delicate situation, one should stand up straight despite helplessness and weakness and the lack of every comfort. One should stretch forth one's neck, saying: Whatever is to happen, let it happen; one should face courageously whatever has been determined and one should not be impatient nor complain till

the trial is over. This is the steadfastness the reward of which is God." [115].

Such heavenly characters are turned entirely towards their Lord; within them, each and every spiritual electron is aligned perfectly with God's will in a straight line without deviation; so that they are transformed into a Divine electromagnet, as it were, and for this reason the angels are pulled down towards them, and all those others who possess some angelic qualities are also attracted by their magnetic spiritual power. Thus God says that the angels descend on them as a natural consequence of *istiqāmah* [Qur'ān 41.31], which may be defined as the perfect alignment of one's internal worlds with the Divine. For the person who is engaged in this process, even the most fundamental of worldly provisions is regarded as a trial: "And if they persevere steadfastly on the straight path, We shall certainly provide them with abundant water to drink, that We may try them thereby." [Qurān 72.17]. Here, God warns us that world-objects are snares of deceit, which seek to divert the lover from the Beloved; but the lover says, "Our Lord is God," and such is his perseverance that angels descend on him [Qur'ān 41.31]. "Our Lord is God" means that the entirety of one's internal worlds are in perfect submission to God, so that God Himself takes up residence in one's heart, and thus it was that the angels fell into prostration before Prophet Adam [as] [Qur'ān 2.35].

Nobody should misunderstand that Love for God precludes sympathy for His creation. The Promised Messiah [as] exhorts us to "arrive in [God's] Love to a stage where the love of everything else is burnt up and to have sympathy with His creatures" [116]. Therefore the one who has submitted entirely to God does love God's creation, but this love is merely a reflection of his Love for God.

How does one know if one fulfils the requirements of Love for God? The answer to this is that we examine our hearts whenever conflict of love arises. If anything of the world asks us to disobey God in any fashion, then we look inwardly in such instances. This is not a facile task, but requires *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr* who are our essential companions on the path of Love. Here again, Love for the Divine differs from worldly love, which is

characterised by falsehood and impetuosity. God declares that true faith is that a person does not love his family if they oppose God and His Messenger [Qur'ān 58.23]. If one loves what is conflicting with God, then one has lost the path of return to God. For one has by his own hands placed a barrier between himself and the Divine, then how can he even claim to be seeking God? "Say, 'If your fathers and your sons and your brethren and your wives and your kinsfolk and the wealth you have acquired and the trade whose dullness you fear and the dwellings which you love are dearer to you than God and His Messenger and striving in His cause, then wait until God brings about His judgment; and God guides not the disobedient people." [Qur'ān 9.24]. That is to say, the lover cannot even imagine that he should disobey his Beloved.

Love is the pinnacle of the path to God, and the repeated command *Anfiqū* (Spend in the way of God) is the means of treading that path. As Sūrah an Nās alludes to the three steps on this path, so there are three stages of *Anfiqū*. The first stage is that a person is grateful to God, as He says, "And spend out of that which We have provided you" [Qur'ān 2.255]. This corresponds to the step of *shukr* (gratitude), where *alladhīna āmanū* (those who possess faith) appreciate the wealth bestowed by God, and they wish to give some of it in the way of God. The second stage is where God describes the *muttaqīn* (righteous and God-fearing) as "those who spend in prosperity and adversity" [Qur'ān 3.135]. This stage is achieved by the step of *tawakkul*, so that the *muttaqīn* no longer fear the world but rather they trust wholly in God and they spend in His cause and they give no importance to their worldly condition. The final and third stage is the stage of *birr* (excellence of moral qualities). God's Word regarding the final stage is: "Never shall you attain to moral excellence unless you spend out of that which you love" [Qur'ān 3.93]. By attention to this verse, the disciples of the Holy Prophet [saw] were elevated to beyond the status of sainthood. They examined their hearts to find whatever they loved most of their worldly possessions, and gave it zealously in the way of God. For the reader who wishes to acquire the Flower, this is a most wonderful methodology. Fundamentally it is the manifestation of *'ishq* (intensity of love), as here one's passion for God burns so fiercely that it consumes all other loves.

Note that it is only at the final stage of *birr* that the Flower of Faith is fully manifested. *Īmān* (faith) is possessed by those in the first stage, but it is dependent on God's gifts to the recipient of Divine favours, and it is further evidenced at the second stage but here we may correctly speak of the Agony of Faith for prosperity and adversity both try the *muttaqīn*. This Agony is inherent in the process of *taqwa* (righteousness), as God says, "You shall surely be tried in your possessions and in your persons... But if you show fortitude and act righteously, that indeed is of strong determination" [Qur'ān 3.187]. Nevertheless, *birr* transforms the Agony of Faith into its Flower, by means of Divine Love.

The progressive blossoming of *īmān* is also manifested by the movements of the Islamic prayer: "The standing of the soul in prayer is that it is prepared to endure every misfortune for the sake of God and is eager to carry out His commands, and its bowing down means that, discarding all other loves and relationships, it leans towards God and becomes His; and its prostration is that, falling at the threshold of God, it loses itself altogether and wipes out its own being." [117]. That is to say, the objective of *ṣalāt* (prayer) is Love.

Similarly, *'ibādah* (worship, adoration) is not mere formal posturings of obeisance before God. Rather, *'ibādah* represents that point of adoration which is the zenith of faith. A person believes in God, then this person bows down and leans towards God, then he or she prostrates before God and annihilates the ego, then after this he or she attains *'ibādah* by adoring the Lord. God says, "O ye who believe! bow down and prostrate yourselves in prayer, and adore your Lord, and do good deeds that you may prosper" [Qur'ān 22.78]. Here, God says that we perfect our *īmān* by leaning towards God, prostrating, and adoring Him; and then we do good deeds with perfected belief. In other words, *'ibādah* is the perfected evolution of the Flower, and it is a form of Love.

Know that *'ishq* is not of the normal order of love, but rather the *'āshiq* (lover) is one who is tied so firmly by the bonds of love that there is no avenue open to love another. *'Āshiq* is similar to the *'ashaqqa* (ivy) which is tied firmly to its place of attachment. Both words are derived from the Arabic root word

'ashiqa (to cling). In fact, *'ishq* causes both the lover and the ivy to cling to their places of attachment, holding fast, as God says, "hold fast to the rope of God, together" [Qur'ān 3.104]. Here the believer is the *'āshiq*, the rope is the *'ishq* and God is the *Ma'shūq* (Beloved). Thus one quality of *'ishq* is that the lover never abandons the Beloved, as in the poetic prayer of the Promised Messiah [as]: "Whether You part from me in anger, Or show Your countenance to me with kindness, Whether You kill me or set me free, How can I ever stop loving You!" [118]. The other quality of *'ishq* is that it consumes all other loves: "[Love's] fire overcomes the fire of sin and puts out the flame of disobedience" [119]. Whether one uses the word *'ishq* or the word *maḥabbat*, which literally means "to be filled with love", but the result is the same, that "The true lover loses himself in the Beloved" [120]. For such as attain this final stage, God declares that "what they spend is a means of drawing near to God" [Qur'ān 9.99]. Furthermore, that the *muttaqīn* are in Paradise but that those in the stage of *birr* are "with God" which is better [Qur'ān 3.199]. Al Jīlānī refers to this as the "paradise of intimacy" [121]. And this is the objective of the path of every lover, to draw near to his Beloved.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Flame

The flame burns first on the wick, and then catches hold of what circumscribes it, and finally it consumes that thing. God tells us that the Holy Qur'ān gives glad tidings to those who, possessing the Flower in their internal existence, blossom and unfold themselves into a new creation and strive to personify goodness in their external existence [Qur'ān 17.10]. The flame's combustion is internal, but it sets ablaze by means of what is external.

The relationship between that which lies within and without our hearts is described by the Holy Prophet [saw], who says, "The world is a prison-house for a believer and Paradise for a non-believer" [106]. Earthly desire diminishes by *īmān* or belief, whereas the false flowers of the world pull a disbeliever hither and thither.

How is this divergence in character brought about between the believer and the disbeliever? Our assertion is that the points of schism are located at *shukr* and its antithesis, at *tawakkul* and its antithesis, and at *'ishq* and its antithesis. Wherever this triumvirate of Thankfulness, Trust and Love reign the heart, from that region of the heart emerges Faith; by contrast, their absence permits *kufr* (disbelief) to invade the kingdom of the heart and flourish therein. It follows that those within the Muslim nation may dwell outside of the precincts of Faith [122].

Importantly, spiritual effectiveness requires that a believer's actions and non-actions, his speech and his silence, his life and his death, abide by the dictates of the triumvirate, which may also be considered as the three fundamental principles of Faith. He may not permit earthly attachments to cause him to sway in the face of their tumultuous assault. God blesses him with awareness that every world-object which he covets is unstable, ephemeral, and impermanent. It is only the principles of Faith which provide him with firm guidance, being relatively

irrefutable and indestructible. Evolving into a more advanced spiritual organism, a believer utilises these principles not as theoretical abstracts but rather as tools which govern his utterances, his gait, his manner of eating, his relationships, his thoughts and even his emotions: "Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides" [Qur'ān 3.192]. In turn, a believer's actions in conformity with these principles reinforce the dominance of those principles over his heart. The objective is that a stage is attained where the principles of Faith are incorporated into a believer's reality to this extent that they flow effortlessy from his heart into his actions. There exists an inherent singularity in his spiritual and physical faculties, which is the perfection and indeed the original pristine purity of human nature:

"O ye people! Fear your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and created therefrom its mate, and from them twain spread many men and women; and fear God, in Whose name you appeal to one another, and respecting ties of relationship. Verily, God watches over you." [Qur'ān 4.2].

That is to say, your origin is a unique *nafs* (soul). Its *zauj* (mate) is your subsequent physical existence, which is created out of that original spiritual reality. From the merging of the *nafs* and its *zauj* burst forth a multitude of spiritual and earthly seeds, which are the fruit yielded by the marriage of your twin existences; the nexus of *khulq* (inner birth) and *khalq* (physical birth) [30]. Fear God in the relationship between your spiritual origin and its earthly consort.

Spiritual phenomenae are seldom comprehended adequately when conveyed in the abstract. The eye desires ever to delineate distinct shapes and patterns from a complexity of visual input. Moreover, a flame undeniably sets fire to its outward manifestations. For this reason, the external consequences of Thankfulness, Trust and Love are best illustrated in connection with a simple and seemingly abstruse consequence. That is to say, those Islamic fashions and outward appearances which are widely exhibited and yet little understood by the contemporary Muslim nation.

The excellence of keeping a beard has been widely advocated in the Muslim nation by dint of the following: "Verily you have in the Prophet of God an excellent model" [Qur'ān 33.22]. It is well established that the Holy Prophet [saw] kept a beard, and for this reason alone the believing men keep beards that their hearts are inundated with love for their spiritual preceptor and they wish to approach close to his model by all means at their disposal. A person may investigate and find social and physical rationales for keeping a beard, but for a believer it suffices that this was the practise of our beloved Holy Prophet [saw].

Nevertheless, in the matter of the beard, as in all else, the principles of Thankfulness, Trust and Love lead us to a new and profound understanding of Islām. Indeed, the Holy Prophet [saw] himself accords eminent status to these principles by declaring that the beard provides a distinction from the *mushrikīn* (pagans who worship deities other than God). Unfortunately, the contemporary medieval-minded Muslim clergy interpret this to mean only that the pagans shave and therefore the Muslims should take to growing beards. Their spiritual faculties halt thereat, and they do not penetrate into the consummate wisdom of the prophetic utterance. By declaring that the beard distinguishes a Muslim from a pagan, the Holy Prophet [saw] means to advise that the beard should be a manifestation of internal *Tauhīd*. Enlightened minds possess knowledge that a man does not acquire belief in God's Unity merely by following a fashion of external appearance; on the contrary, a physical action's destination is established by the spiritual impetus which propels it. For this reason, the Holy Prophet [saw] conveys his message thus: "Do the opposite of what the pagans do. Keep the beard and cut the moustaches short" [123]. That is to say: Establish Thankfulness, Trust and Love for One God in your hearts, as this is the essence of opposition to the pagans, and then also your outward appearance should reflect this divergence in your internal realities.

The alternative is that the internal should follow and be subjugated to the external, which is a precarious path for one who seeks God. What is authentic cannot take after what is illusory, what is everlasting cannot pursue what is transient. The Holy Qur'ān declares that most humans know only the outer part of the life of this world, and they are unaware of the

Hereafter [Qur'ān 30.8]. By contrasting knowledge of the Hereafter with knowledge of the outer part of this life, God brings to our attention that the Hereafter develops from our internal reality. The Arabic word *dunyā*, which is translated as "world", also means whatever is low; by contrasting the Hereafter with *dunyā*, God means to inform us that our destination is more lofty, that our final consequence is something more significant, that our existence is meaningful. Then God follows this by saying that those who follow exclusively what is external should reflect within their souls and consider the internal reality encountered therein, but that many are those who disbelieve and cover up the meeting with their Lord [Qur'ān 30.9]. Unfortunately, the contemporary Muslim nation display little awareness of the Holy Prophet [saw]'s internal reality or of their own souls, by their cosmetic adherence to, "Verily you have in the Prophet of God an excellent model" [Qur'ān 33.22]. Thus it is that the Holy Prophet [saw] was victorious, and in every place of struggle they are vanquished. Remember this, that victory is for those who are fuelled internally by faith [Qur'ān 61.14].

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Death of a Flower

Islām is a comprehensive mandate. It guides to what is healthy, but it also warns against what is harmful; both arms of Islām must be employed by a Muslim who aspires to pluck the Flower. "You enjoin good and forbid evil and have faith in God" [Qur'ān 3.111]. Remember this that God's command is for our own benefit. If it were for the benefit of others, then God would say that we should believe in Him first, and then we should enjoin good and forbid evil on others subsequently. However, here God places belief or faith as the final consequence. The meaning of this is that we enjoin good and forbid evil on our selves, and thereby we ourselves develop faith; for the consequence of *īmān* depends primarily on our selves, and only in a secondary fashion on our interactions with others. Having delved into the methodologies whereby faith may be planted, may take root, may flourish, and may pollinate its environs, so also we should consider what God means when He counsels "forbid evil" to one's self. That is to say, we shall briefly examine those spiritual afflictions which cause the Flower's death.

First, as we have noted, that faith will not flourish except in the soil of truthfulness; and hence intuitively we postulate that falsehood poisons the flower. This is affirmed very forcefully by God, Who emphatically equates *īmān* with truthfulness and Who also identifies *kufr* with falsehood: "those who disbelieve follow falsehood while those who believe follow the truth from their Lord" [Qur'ān 47.4].

This is essentially because the very existence of falsehood denies the reality of God in one's consciousness; as God says that falsehood cannot exist in His presence: "The Truth has come and falsehood has vanished away" [Qur'ān 17.82]. Therefore untruth inherently is the pre-eminent denial of faith in God.

Also because falsehood in itself is evidenced only when a person gives precedence to the world over God. That unfortunate person's god follows the world, rather than that his world should follow God. Such a posture is of course incompatible with faith, as God says, "Those whose labour is lost in the life of this world... Those are they who disbelieve in the signs of their Lord and in the meeting with Him" [Qur'ān 18.105-6].

Furthermore, because falsehood discourages a person from self-analysis and critique, whereby he or she may progress in faith by subsequent self-improvement. On the contrary, those in whom is embedded falsehood, have the habit of blaming others rather than themselves. Paradoxically, they may thereby encourage faith in those whom they blame, but they are unable to advance themselves. Love of truth is what foments courage to examine oneself and admonish oneself and then improve oneself. Far from this, falsehood is that even if a brother or sister points out our flaws, we fail to acknowledge them but instead we express outrage that a fellow believer has favoured us with admonition. Again, this injustice leads inexorably to *kufr*: "And who is more unjust than he who invents a lie concerning God, or rejects the truth when it comes to him? Is there not an abode in hell for those who disbelieve?" [Qur'ān 29.69].

After falsehood, amongst the several other afflictions which may cause spiritual death, cowardice should be noted. Regarding such people who fear death in the cause of Islām, God says, "So ruin seize them!" [Qur'ān 47.21]. Again because he gives precedence to the world, a fainthearted person cannot approach near to his Lord. The fact is that he is not aware of the Unity of God, otherwise he would fear Him alone. To those endowed with understanding of this matter, God says, "So fear Me alone" [Qur'ān 16.52].

Another pathogen which may kill the Flower is wilful disobedience; for faith is to declare, "we hear and we obey" [Qur'ān 24.52]. Most unfortunate is the person who accepts only in part the impress of a messenger and then casts even that away, saying, "And that is what my mind commended to me" [Qur'an 20.97]. To step away from the signs of God is

indeed a matter of grave concern [Qur'ān 7.176-7]. The Flower of belief can never flourish in a healthy direction by yielding to one's own desires, but rather it blossoms only under the light of God's guidance: "And who is more erring than he who follows his evil inclinations without any guidance from God?" [Qur'ān 28.51]. As Imām 'Alī [ra] declares of the person who lacks faith, "He takes the Qur'ān according to his own views and [he takes] right [action] after his [own] passions" [124]. This is of importance, because it is a widespread phenomenon that even the religious clergy twist God's Message to follow their own desires, when in fact the converse is required by *īmān*.

Alternatively, the Flower's demise may be by the sickness which causes one to walk haughtily in the earth, and which again is based on untruth and the false supposition that one may reach the mountains in greatness [Qur'ān 17.38]. This spiritual ailment is commonly known as arrogance, and is dealt with elsewhere in this book and in more depth. Ingratitude is another such malady.

Another source of great harm to our faith, is that we seek succour from another than God, attaching insufficient value to His Greatness. By worshiping God, we ourselves are imbued with Divine attributes; conversely, we deprive the Flower within our own hearts by turning to others. God warns such people, "Weak indeed are the seeker and the sought. They esteem not God with the estimation which is His due." [Qur'ān 22.74-5]. That is to say, the person who solicits help from those who are themselves only created objects, is himself rendered feeble by this process. A believer supplicates to God alone.

Despair is a psychological process which may also cause serious injury to the faith of a believer. It has been noted that suffering encourages faith, and that the struggle between death and life promotes spiritual advancement [Qur'ān 67.3]; but the matter is more elaborate. For a certainty, natural disasters such as the Kashmir Earthquake may cause what is Divine within us to flourish, but the tragic events following Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast of the USA indicate that Satan may also manifest at times of trial. The purpose of God is to nurture faith, and the purpose of Satan is to promote disbelief. In this regard, the Holy Qur'ān acknowledges that distress may cause men to

despair and turn away from God [Qur'ān 30.37]. Adversity possesses a curious capacity to enhance and bring out whatever is within a person's soul. God's messages are also a form of trial for humankind, and so they too externalise the reality of a person's internal condition. Abū Bakr [ra] and 'Amr ibn Hishām were both traders of Makkah, but their inner realities became manifest by God's Message. Abū Bakr [ra] slew his ego in the path of Islām, and so he was named *Siddīq* (Truthful); whereas 'Amr ibn Hishām's ego and worldliness vituperated Islām, and so he was named *Abū Jahl* (father of ignorance). For this reason, God says that He sends His messengers with the Discrimination [Qur'ān 3.4], meaning that the Message discriminates between what is good and evil, and furthermore it reveals what is hidden within man. The Holy Prophet [saw] declares that the Holy Qur'ān is a proof in our favour or against us [125]. It is not the case that Abū Bakr [ra] and 'Amr ibn Hishām were fundamentally altered by God's trial. Rather, their respective godliness and impiety were latent within their souls, as fire is latent in flint. The spark of the Divine Message set fire to their internal realities, as God is The *Ḥaqq* and so He brings out the truth of a person. Therefore, wherever God touches humankind, Satan also lies in waiting; for this reason, it is said that Iblīs accosts us on the straight path to God [Qur'ān 7.17]. Faith is to rise towards God at the moment of trial, and disbelief is to despair thereat.

By now, the reader will understand that the Flower may be deprived of heavenly waters through all manner of ailments, and thereby give up life. We cannot here describe every such sickness which assails the heart. Nevertheless, it should be understood that falsehood is of primary significance as a root cause of spiritual decay. In fact, the words "those who disbelieve follow falsehood" [Qur'ān 47.4] may be understood to mean that all the manifold paths of disbelief have a relationship with untruth. Every affliction that is toxic to faith's flower will reveal falsehood as its origin. For instance, a person who knows the truth and reality of God can never disobey Him, nor can he entertain ideas of self-importance, nor can he fear others than God, nor can the world cause him to despair. For this reason, God curses the liars [Qur'ān 3.62, 24.8] not vindictively, but He merely describes the natural consequence of the abject condition of their spiritual reality. How unfortunate

are they in whom the Flower dies, and so finally their hearts whisper, "God is dead" [126].

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Attachment to God

God describes those who approach near to Him by the word *auliyā'*, which is often translated as "saints", but which literally means those who enjoy proximity or contiguity to God. A similar notion is found in the word *muqarrabūn* which again signifies those who are close to God, and who are described as the foremost amongst the believers [Qur'ān 56.11-2]. It should be noted that the words *auliyā'* and *muqarrabūn* also imply constant beneficence from God, as nearness to Him is synonymous with receiving His blessings. For how may one approach the Sun without receiving light?

A further reward obtained by this august station is that one is no longer subject to fear nor grief, because one is fully attached to God alone: "Behold! The *auliyā'* of God shall certainly have no fear, nor shall they grieve." [Qur'ān 10.63].

The means to draw near to the Beloved is found in *'ibādah* (worship, adoration, slavery), which is a form of *'ishq* (Love); for the *'abd* (slave) is near to God and the *'āshiq* (lover) is one who clings to God: "And when My slaves ask thee about me, then I am Near." [Qur'ān 2.187]. That is to say, God is Near to His slaves. One cannot approach God by any other gate than the gate of the slave and the lover. Abū Ṭālib al Makki opines that there are three spiritual stations amongst the *auliyā'*, and he describes these as the *ahl al khauf* (people of Fear), the *ahl al ḥubb* (people of Love), and finally the *ahl al 'ilm billāh* (people of Knowledge of God) [127]. We shall see how the validity of these spiritual stations is verified by God's Word.

Never forget that Islām is a positive faith, and the journey towards God is a process of ever-growing positive energy and gain. It is true that for every gain there is a corresponding loss, yet the loss is of ephemeral worldly pleasure and the gain is of the existent pleasure of God. That is to say, those who possess true understanding of the existence of God's pleasure and the

non-existence of all other pleasures, they know that the words "Surely, we are from God and surely towards Him we return" do not imply any loss within the reality of existence in its absolute sense. God explains this by the words *lanabluwannakum* which are translated as "We will try you" [Qur'ān 2.156]; but the full meaning of the Arabic root word *balā'* is to establish the true condition of a person by subjecting that person to either pleasurable favours or harmful afflictions. Therefore it should not be thought that fear and hunger, loss of wealth and lives and fruits, is exclusively a process of suffering. Rather, all these physical conditions may reflect spiritual experiences which describe progressive stages in a human's blossoming relationship with God and therefore may indicate a fundamentally positive and pleasurable process. Fear of God is the initial condition, which repels a human from sin, and this gives way to hunger for God which promotes the first unsteady steps towards God. Remember this that fear and hunger in relation to God are the same fear and hunger experienced by the lover in relation to his Beloved, and therefore they are a fear and hunger derived from spiritual bliss. These are described first by God because they are inherent human qualities which are found to some degree even in those who profess not to believe in God. At times of peril, the avowed Atheist is often found wretchedly beseeching Divine succour, and his hunger for God is what drives him incessantly to pursue the false deities which invariably plague his dreams and aspirations. Fear and hunger may also allude respectively to the fires of hell and the delights of heaven; therefore our attention is called initially to God's attribute of *Māliki Yaumuddīn* and the Judgment Day. Loss of wealth subsequently calls our attention to God as *Ar Raḥīm*, Who grants us the wealth that we have earned by our labours. At this stage, we have developed to a condition which cannot be shared by the Atheist, for now we no longer merely fear and hunger, but our love for God enables us to gladly give up what we have earned; we recognise that God is *Ar Raḥīm*, that He has rewarded our works, and therefore we do not complain if our wealth is removed. Here we have reached the limits of human endeavour and further progress upon the spiritual path to God is entirely dependent on Divine Providence. If God so blesses us, then He now removes from us our *anfus* (souls, lives). This loss of souls and lives is not a negative experience, but on the contrary it is a most sublime

blessing. For the loss of souls signifies the spiritual annihilation of egos. *Ar Raḥmān* from His pure benevolence now graciously grants new souls to such fortunate seekers. The *anfus* which have been lost are the *anfus al ammārah* (souls that call to evil) and the *anfusi llawwāma* (self-reproving souls), and now one enters Paradise in this very life. One final stage remains, aspired to by Rābia al-Adawiyya and surely achieved by the Holy Prophet [saw]: the loss of fruits, meaning that a person progresses beyond loving God even for His attribute of *Ar Raḥmān*, but instead he loves God for God alone. The word "fruits" is employed because fruits are not grown by human efforts at cultivation, but they are a natural gift from God which exist even in the absence of human endeavours; thus they are a manifestation of *Ar Raḥmān*, meaning He Who graciously bestows favours without any effort from the recipients of His grace. The person who loves God supremely is no longer attached to the fruits of Paradise, but rather he is attached only to God. At this final stage, the slave of God does not confine himself to praising the *Māliki Yaumuddīn* or *Ar Raḥīm* or *Ar Raḥmān*, but instead his soul testifies *Al ḥamdu lillāhi rabbil ālamīn*, that "all praise is for God alone Who is Lord of all my worlds". The slave has found his way to his Destination, which is the Origin of The Fātiḥah, by gaining the loss of wealth and lives and fruits. Now, and now alone, is loss fully transformed into gain, and only the elect of God may find himself in the fortune of misfortune, uttering, "Surely our Origin and our Destination is God alone". May God enable us in our varying capacities to undertake the path of the elect.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Istighfār

By the grace of God, we have arrived at the appropriate juncture in our spiritual journey from which to open up the matter of *istighfār*. This Arabic word cannot be properly understood without first considering its linguistic origins. The common understanding is that *istighfār* means a person should seek forgiveness for sins from God. The Promised Messiah [as] explains that if this were so, then the Holy Prophet [saw] would not do *istighfār* seventy or more times each day, rather he would never do *istighfār* because he was sinless and God describes him as an excellent model [Qur'ān 33.22]. The Arabic root of this word is *ghafara*, meaning to cover up, and the perfection of *istighfār* is that God covers up those innate human flaws which may lead to committing errors. As the Promised Messiah [as] says, "this meaning is then enlarged to include the covering up of a sin that has been committed, but the true meaning is that God should safeguard the supplicant against his natural weakness and should bestow upon him power from His power, and knowledge from His knowledge, and light from His light." [128]. *Istighfār* is the practise of those righteous people who advance to an elevated condition of spirituality [129] and spend much of the night in prayer. Thus God affirms that His slaves perform *istighfār* at dawn [Qur'ān 51.16-9], seeking His protection from fallibility in the day that follows.

Prophets exemplify the *istighfār* of the immaculate, as opposed to the *istighfār* of those who are mired in sin. They are the chosen ones of God, and they comprehend His reality. Knowing the reality of the world, so we never put ourselves in the path of a lion, or hold a serpent close to our bosom. Similarly, prophets never knowingly offend God. In this regard, it is instructive to examine closely the story of Prophet Adam [as]. He was the first man to receive a rudimentary Law from God, which set out the basic principles required for the spiritual development of his people. As God says that a good word is a good tree and a bad word is a bad tree [Qur'ān 14.25-7], so He

tells us that a certain tree was forbidden to Prophet Adam [as]; meaning that God's Word prohibited specific actions which would yield unhealthy fruits or consequences. Then Satan tricked Prophet Adam [as] and his wife, and thus caused them to taste that fruit by committing some action prohibited by the Law. But it should be remembered that this was by the deceit of Satan; it was not an act of wilful disobedience by Prophet Adam [as] [Qur'ān 7.21-3]. Furthermore, we learn something tremendously beautiful from the subsequent internal response of this great prophet and his noble consort. Being sincere servants of God, their innocent error engendered remembrance of God; they were acutely aware that He was watching them, and so they grew profoundly conscious of their exposure to His all-encompassing Knowledge. They felt naked by their heightened awareness of the human vulnerability to Satan's machinations. Furthermore, their subsequent behaviour teaches us an exquisite lesson. As virtuous believers, they responded to the realisation of their human limitations, by beseeching God to cover them with His Perfection. That is to say, they did *istighfār* of a sorts: "they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the Garden" [Qur'ān 7.23]. We learn therefore that Satan tricked Prophet Adam [as] into inadvertently breaking the Law, and so he responded in the best way; he realised that the only way to be safeguarded entirely from error, was to do *istighfār* before God.

The reason that even the prophets do *istighfār* is deeply connected with *ilaihi rāji'ūn.* The world pulls men by its illusory loveliness but God is the place of return for the believers, as He says, "Beautified for men is the love of desired things – women and children, and stored-up heaps of gold and silver... but it is God with Whom is an excellent home" [Qur'ān 3.15]. The word *maāb* is rendered as "home", but its literal meaning in Arabic is the place to which one returns after going out. However, that which happens on the Day of return is indeed a fearful thing. God says, "The Day when every soul shall find itself confronted with the good it has done and the evil it has done. It will wish there were a great distance between it and that. And God warns you against His Soul. And God is Most Compassionate to slaves" [Qur'ān 3.31]. The words *Nafsahū* may be translated as "His Self" or "His Soul", and the same word *nafs* is also applied to the souls of men. This is not to say that God has a soul like

the souls of men, but this is a metaphorical expression similar to how God speaks of His hands and His face. This verse only means that on The Day of Judgment, the spiritual essence of men will be confronted with the Spiritual Essence of God, and on that day every man will do *istighfār* because even the perfection of men is rendered imperfect when faced with the Perfection of God. Only God's Infinite Compassion will save men from utter destruction on that Day. For this reason, *istighfār* should not be misunderstood to mean *taubah* (repentance), which is the beginning of a sinner's journey towards God. Rather, *istighfār* is necessary even near the spiritual end-point when the perfected soul of a limited entity begs protection from the Perfect Soul of the Unlimited Entity. As man can only move within his own limited capacity, and the world always exerts its influence, therefore a man does his utmost to return towards God, and then he asks God to cover up even his innate human frailties so that he may be transformed into a reflection of the Divine.

This understanding opens up the philosophy and wisdom of God's command to the Holy Prophet [saw], that he should do *istighfār* at the time of victory, when he sees men entering Islām in their multitudes [Qur'ān 110.2-4]. Chapter 110 of the Holy Qur'ān means to say, "O Prophet! you have attained human perfection, and so God has granted your heartfelt desire that the multitudes should enter His religion. So now you should manifest Divine perfection to them by means of *istighfār*, because you are now the exemplar for multitudes, and so no error is permissible". That is to say, the physical victory was accompanied by a spiritual victory. For this reason Chapter 110 is given the title of *Naṣr* (help), because *istighfār* is the help that is required for the slave to be safeguarded from imperfection and so attain victory over his self.

Authentic *istighfār* is a latter stage of spirituality, for God says, "The steadfast, and the truthful, and the humble, and those who spend [in the way of God], and those who do *istighfār* in the last portion [of perfection]" [Qur'ān 3.18].

CHAPTER TWENTY

The perfect manifestation

The perfect manifestation of Love for God is found in the personality of Prophet Muḥammad [saw], as God commands him: "Say, 'If you love God, follow me; [then] God will love you and forgive you your sins'" [Qur'ān 3.32]. In other words, the person who loves God must necessarily follow the path of the Holy Prophet [saw], because his path is the path of Love, and none can surpass him, and therefore all who tread this path are his followers. Thus the Promised Messiah [as] says that Prophet Muḥammad [saw] is the "Leader of the Lovers of God" [130]. Even those who do not formally acknowledge the truth of Islām, through ignorance or some other innocent defect, they follow in the blessed footsteps of the Holy Prophet [saw] by loving God. As a result of giving oneself to this path, God replies with His Love and the evil deeds of repentant sinners are covered up. Here we can also understand the word *ghafara* in its wider context of covering up sins. *Yaghfir* means not only that God will forgive those sins, but rather that He will cover them up as if they do not exist, and therefore we learn that non-existence of sin is the natural consequence of Love. Another way to understand this verse is, "Say, 'If you love God, follow me; [because] God loves you and forgives you your sins'" [Qur'ān 3.32]. This is also true, because in fact God's Love precedes the sentiments of those who love Him. In any case, it is evident that now the only methodology to achieve the lover's objective and approach near to God, is by asking the way from the Holy Prophet [saw]: "And when My slaves ask thee about me, then I am Near." [Qur'ān 2.187]. Nearness is only when the slaves ask Muḥammad [saw], and there is no mention of asking the way from others.

Being the most sublime lover of God, the consummate exponent of *innā lillāhi wa innā ilaihi rāji'ūn* is Prophet Muḥammad [saw]. That the Holy Prophet [saw] represents the *ruj'ā* (return to God) is a subtle point contained in the following words: "Nay! man does indeed transgress, because he thinks

himself to be independent. Surely, unto thy Lord is the return" [Qur'ān 96.7-9]. Note the word "thy". These verses say that the sins of humans are because they seek a way other than the appropriate *ruj'ā*. But the last verse also defines what is the appropriate *ruj'ā*. It says *innā ilā rabbikar ruj'ā*. These words are addressed directly to the Holy Prophet [saw], and they say that the appropriate return is towards his Lord, and not the Lord of others. Know that perfect understanding of the truth is pre-eminent among the qualities required to return to God, therefore again God says that the truth is from the Lord of Muḥammad [saw], not the Lord of others [Qur'ān 2.148]. For the glow of all other beacons falls wan, as lamp-light pales before the glory of the noonday sun, now that Prophet Muḥammad [saw] is known to us.

The Messenger of God [saw] was the original prototype of the perfect man, and thus created spiritually even before Prophet Adam [as] [131]. Although Prophet Adam [as] was certainly of those who submitted to God, we find that the Holy Prophet [saw] is commanded to declare, "I am the first of those who submit" [Qur'ān 6.164]. Therefore he was from God, before and above any other who was from God. He was ready to lose every thing of this world for the sake of God: spouse, blood relations, friends, wealth, sustenance, health, and more. His entire lifetime was a journey of returning constantly and unstintingly towards God, and God Himself affirms this: "Surely thy latter state is better for thee than the former" [Qur'ān 93.5]. Note that the Holy Prophet [saw]'s finality should be understood in the same sense as his originality; that is to say, his description as being the first and the last means to express his vast encapsulation of the institution of prophethood. It in no way denies the conferral of prophethood after his physical death, any more than it denies the reality of prophets before his physical birth.

We may ask ourselves, what is the destination of one, for whom it is declared that his latter state is ever better than the former? The answer is that the destination is limitless. God says of the Holy Prophet [saw], "And if all the trees that were in the earth were pens, and the ocean – seven more oceans to replenish it – were ink, the words of God would not be exhausted" [Qur'ān 31.28]. Surely with truth it was said that his

life was the Holy Qur'ān [78]. How may we confine or limit one whose character manifests the oceans of the Perfect Word? I was a young man when I began to seek imperfections of God's *magnum opus*, in response to the Divine command, "Then look again! Seest thou any flaw?" [Qur'ān 67.4]. Twenty years have passed since then, and I bear witness to the fact: "Aye, look again, and yet again. Thy sight will return unto thee confused and fatigued." [Qur'ān 67.5]. For no incongruity was I able to find in Muḥammad saw.

The Holy Prophet saw returned to God through the path of Love for His sake alone: he once declared that he may have taken his most faithful companion as a dearly beloved, except that brotherhood in submission to God was better than this [132]. Consider also his poignant words on the death of his precious son, and how hauntingly they evidence his devotion to God: "The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord. O Ibrāhīm! Indeed we are grieved by your separation." [28]. Bearing Witness to his absolute devotion, God instructs the Holy Prophet saw to say, "My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are *lillāh* (for God), the Lord of the Worlds" [Qur'ān 6.163]. We see how his journey begins and ends with *lillāh*, for he has returned completely to his Origin. Furthermore, the strangest miracle happens within such a person, because the one who entirely abandons the world is declared to be *rahmata lil ālamīn* (mercy to the worlds) [Qur'ān 21.108]. This is because such a one loves as God loves, for the fire of God's Love permits no other fire to burn.

The following words shed more light on this aspect of the Holy Prophet saw's Love for God: "Haply thou wilt grieve thyself to death because they believe not" [Qur'ān 26.4]. That is to say, the denial of God engenders such suffering in the Holy Prophet saw, that he dies and nothing remains but God. In this regard, it is observed that *Aḥmad* comprises one of the names of the Holy Prophet saw, and that this name dissolves itself into *Aḥad*, meaning the Oneness of God: "He effaced himself to such an extent, as if the letter *m* had fallen away from the name *Aḥmad* saw" [133]. For *Aḥmad* without *m* is nothing other than *Aḥad* (One God).

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

A beautiful Edict

God has established a beautiful Edict which is this: that we may not approach Him except by annihilation of the self. The believers do not remain satisfied that they have been given spiritual life, but rather they comprehend that they must develop further into a new creation which is attained by death of the ego. God says, "He brings forth the living from the dead, and He is the Bringer forth of the dead from the living" [Qur'ān 6.96]. Importantly, these words do not describe a reversal of fortunes, but rather they describe the progressive spiritual evolution of a believer. Regarding the first process, it is an action of God that He brings forth the living from the spiritually dead. But regarding the second process, God incorporates it into His own attributes, naming Himself as the *Mukhriju* (Bringer forth) of the dead from the living. This is to confer honour on the second process, which is the process of ego annihilation and attainment of the Divine. A believer seeks indefatigably this objective, and he always moves forwards into God through death, and for this reason God proceeds to say, "That is God! Wherefore then are you turned back?" [Qur'ān 6.96].

Know this, that death of the ego is a more advanced stage even than spiritual life, and it is an inevitable step in the journey, for it is only after such death that a person may claim to worship no other but rather he submits only to God. The spiritual trajectory of the Holy Prophet [saw] bears witness to this: "My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are for God, the Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. And so am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit." [Qur'ān 6.163-4]. Note in this verse that submission is established after death of the ego.

The process of ego-annihilation and contiguous incorporation of the self into God is further elucidated by the following:

"Surely, God has purchased of the believers their persons and their property in return for the Garden they have; they fight in the cause of God, and they slay and are slain – a promise incumbent on Himself in the Torah and the Gospel, and the Qur'ān..." [Qur'ān 9.111]

Note that God purchases the souls of the believers and all that belongs to them. The word "purchase" implies that God gives something to the believers in exchange for their souls, which is His own Self. Paradise is that which surrounds God and it is given in place of the belongings which surround the believers, but God always gives better than He takes and therefore He gives not Paradise but He gives His Self in return for the selves of the believers. Know that the words of God possess an outer meaning which is pronounced and which is often contingent on outer circumstances, but also that they possess an inner meaning which is discovered on deep reflection and is constant insomuch as it reflects the fundamental laws of the spiritual world; for the soul exists eternally irrespective of transient outer perceptions. Here the believers are said to slay and be slain, and this description is spiritual *ad infinitum*, and is not contingent on a limited state of physical warfare between the Muslim nation and the enemy. The universality of this description in time and space is further demonstrated by God's statement that the slaying of the believing slayers is a promise made by God in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'ān. Even the Gospel, which was a message of uncompromising love and peace, and the Holy Qur'ān which is a message for times of peace as well as war, teach that the believers are those who slay and are slain. Then what is one slaying, and yet remaining in love and peace? And how may one be defined as a "believer", in the absence of physical warfare? The answer to this question is that one slays one's ego, and further that the believer's ego is slain by God, and this is why the verse begins by stating that God purchases our souls and all that belongs to us, which is one and the same as to say that God slays our egos. All praise is due to God Who declares that it is not possible for a believer to destroy his ego only by his own efforts to slay it, but it is God Who slays the ego. The praise is indeed for God, Who in His *raḥmāniyyat* slays us and in His *raḥīmiyyat* rewards our efforts in ego-annihilation; Who is the Master of the Day when the selves will be confronted by the Self, Whom

we worship by slaying our egos, Whom we beseech for help that He should slay us because we cannot slay without His succour. Thus all praise is for He Who guides the arrow of the self in its straight path to the Flame of the Self where it is consumed and burnt to non-existence and All-Existence. That straight path, and none other, is the path of God's blessings. For everything outside of All-Existence incurs the displeasure of all existence, and the selves are astray from the Self. The Fātiḥah is in every word of God, and it is in the heart of the believer possessed of the Flower.

Regarding the words "they slay and are slain", we can learn much from the example of the noble warriors who fought alongside the Holy Prophet [saw] in the Battle of Badr. Verily these stalwart champions of Islām were among the foremost in both physical and spiritual warfare for the sake of God. In this battle, a mere three hundred and thirteen poorly equipped Muslim fighters, including elderly men and inexperienced youths, courageously faced a vastly better equipped and more numerous contingent of pagan aggressors who sought to obliterate the message of Islām. The debt we owe these companions of the Holy Prophet [saw] in these trying circumstances is unquantifiable. Moreover, and importantly for us, their conduct amply demonstrated that the sacrifice of their physical lives was because these warriors had already sacrificed their egos for the pleasure of God. They were able to abandon this world so readily because in truth they had attained death in their hearts and minds before taking to the battlefield. May their names be forever treasured and recalled with honour. For a certainty, never in the history of humankind have so many owed so much to so few. Perhaps their service may be better appreciated by paying heed to what is surely one of the most heart-stirring prayers ever uttered by man: "O God! If You wish [to destroy the believers], You will never be worshipped after today" [134]. These remarkable words were spoken by the Holy Prophet [saw] on the day of the Battle of Badr. For on that day, those whose selves had been slain confronted those whose selves were rampant. That is to say, it was the day when the manifestations of God confronted the manifestations of Satan, and how could God be worshipped thereafter if Satan should triumph?

Every manifestation differs, as we observe that every receptacle differs in its capacity. That is to say, a cup of water differs from a pitcher of water, which again differs from an ocean of water. Furthermore, the pitchers are filled from the ocean. Similarly, the manifestations of God are filled from the most expansive and complete manifestation of God. We find this only in the personality of the Holy Prophet [saw] who grieves his self to death [Qur'ān 26.4]. In such a state of self-abnegation, he is able to draw near to God, and God leans down, so that the Holy Prophet [saw] becomes one chord to two bows, or closer still [Qur'ān 53.10]. As the Promised Messiah [as] tells us, salvation requires that "love should surge up on both sides" [135]. Note well, the most marvellous words here are not that the Holy Prophet [saw] is one chord to two bows, but that he is *adnā* (closer still). How may a person be closer than a single chord to two bows, except that he annihilates himself and becomes a chord to only the one bow of God? This glory is attained by first submitting to the agonising process of killing one's own soul, as God says, "kill your souls" [Qur'ān 2.55]. The Promised Messiah [as] reminds us of this same truth when he quotes a well-known Punjabi proverb: "He who asks dies a death, so die and then ask [from God]" [136]. It is only by detachment from all earthly desires that a person is able to kill his self. The Promised Messiah [as] elucidates beautifully how the sūfis describe this as *fanā* (extinction of the self), which by God's grace leads to *baqā* (spiritual revival), and then to *liqā'* (communion with God) [137]. It is within God's gift entirely whether He bestows the final prize of communion with Himself. For this reason, He describes this stage as "Light upon light!" [Qur'ān 24.36]. That is to say, the Light of the Divine Creator has fallen upon the light of the mortal created object, and so these two lights are melded in the person of the Holy Prophet [saw].

Know this further, that only by killing one's self-ego and entering communion with God, does a person merit that God should say, "And you desire not [a thing] except that God, the Lord of the [external and internal] worlds desires [it]" [Qur'ān 81.30]. By turning his face often to heaven, the Night of Power is manifest, and the angels descend, then the slave is enchanted by what he finds. He is enamoured of his Master to this extent that the Master's desires cannot be distinguished from his own desires [Qur'ān 81.30]. And then it may be said

that the slave loves what the Master loves, or the Master loves what the slave loves, for the twain have met and are now inseparable. Is it the slave who follows the Master, or is it the Master Who follows the slave? This is a delicate question, and it should be understood correctly. The Promised Messiah [as] writes, "As of today, we belong to the Beloved; And the Beloved belongs to us" [138]. God may indeed follow our desires, but this is only after pious submission to Him; He follows as the Master follows, and we follow as the slaves follow. Thus we understand the famous pronouncement of the Holy Prophet [saw]: "Many people with dishevelled hair are driven away from the door [but they are so pious] that if they were to swear in the name of God, He would definitely fulfil that" [139]. Prophet Lao Tzu [as] addresses this same question by saying, "Hold fast to the Power of the One. It will unify the body and merge it with the spirit... one who holds this Power brings Tao to this very earth" [140]. In fact, the prophets of Asia and Africa and Europe and Australia and America have all manifested the victory of slavehood, and they taught slavehood to their followers. Note also the sacred words of God: "Verily, We see thee turning thy face often to heaven; surely, then, will We make thee turn to the *qiblah* which thou likest. So, turn thy face towards the Sacred Mosque." [Qur'ān 2.145]. As heaven is the *qiblah* (destination) of the Holy Prophet [saw], so God follows his desire and causes his *qiblah* to prevail on earth. But this is after prostration by the devotee. That is to say, in the Holy Prophet [saw] we find God manifest as the *qiblah* in both places. From this humble Messenger of God, we learn the reality of "And He is God, in the heavens and in the earth" [Qur'ān 6.4]. It is in the perfect man, that heaven and earth concur.

And this is the only desire which is permitted by *innā lillāhi* and *innā ilaihi rāji'ūn*, which both enunciate the same reality: that God is, and we are not. In other words, the proof of God's existence is found in non-existence of the slave. The messengers are those chosen ones who actualise non-existence, and are therewith given the Book, and of them it is the Holy Prophet [saw] who most perfectly manifests the Divine. For if a person's ego is burnt up, then there only remains the Flame of God, and this Existence excels in goodness, as God says:

"Then We gave the Book for an inheritance to those of Our servants whom We chose. And of them is he who is breaking down his ego, and of them is he who takes the middle course, and of them is he who excels in acts of goodness by God's leave. And that indeed is the great distinction" [Qur'ān 35.33]

This is for those who are given the Book, that is to say the prophets and messengers; but we should also turn our thoughts to our own flawed condition. God says that few are those who would correctly follow the command "Kill your egos!" [Qur'ān 4.67]. This is because everything in the earth praises itself and excludes non-existence and is veiled from the Cause of causes [141]. Nevertheless, one should not fall quickly to despair; for God also promises that He will guide those who believe towards Himself if they hold fast to Him [Qur'ān 4.176]. That is to say, the Flower of Faith fosters attachment to God, which in turn leads a person towards God. For this reason, God is named *Al Mu'min* (The Faithful) [Qur'ān 59.24], because the perfection and so the final destination of Faith is Himself. But the Divine Message tells us something yet more exhilarating and wondrous, which may offer hope to even the most recalcitrant sinner. This is that the intoxicating fragrance of this Flower is not something which will tolerate denial; it is all-pervasive and all-conquering. Praise is for God in the beginning and in the end [Qur'ān 28.71], meaning that all things shall return to God and be consumed by His Love. For *al ḥamdu lillāh* is only attained by the final stage of Love.

There are those who opine that hell is a never-ending estrangement from God; and there are those who propose that heaven is an eternal affiliation with God. But the words *ilaihi turja'ūn* (to Him will you be brought back) may communicate a still more remarkable idea regarding our spiritual destiny. That finally the Flower will catch hold of all hearts, and all will be non-existence except God Himself:

"And call not on any other god beside God. There is no God but He. Everything will perish except Himself. His is the judgment, and to Him will you be brought back." [Qur'ān 28.89]

The praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds.

Postscript

God has repeatedly affirmed that the most advanced stages of nearness to Him are in His gift. That is to say, we do not ourselves gain insight regarding God, but rather He enters our perceptive faculties: "Eyes cannot reach Him, but He reaches the eyes" [Qur'ān 6.104].

It is a matter of great regret that the Muslim nation have closed the door on Divine revelation, and have thereby cut off all avenues by which the Divine may enter human perception. It is as if they subscribe to their own invented notion which finds no basis in the Holy Qur'ān, that God cannot reach the eyes, but eyes of their scholars reach Him at religious academies and other such centres of learning. Small wonder then that they flounder in spiritual darkness.

The Promised Messiah [as] explains, "In the same way, human reason, which resembles the eye, needs the light of the sun of prophethood. And when that sun disappears, reason becomes confused and dark; just as you cannot see with the eye alone, you cannot see without the light of prophethood" [142].

Alas, the Medieval-minded scholars wilfully ignore fundamental principles set forth in God's Word, and their followers are no less negligent. By terminating messengerhood, they do no less than seek to terminate the *raḥmat* (mercy) of God: "Our command. Verily, We have ever been sending [messengers], as a mercy from thy Lord" [Qur'ān 44.6-7]. Messengerhood is inherent to God's mercy and so God says He ever chooses His messengers from angels and from men [Qur'ān 22.76]. Those who endeavour to finish with God's *raḥmat*, the natural consequence is that they depart from God's presence: "And who can despair of the mercy of his Lord save those who go astray?" [Qur'ān 15.57]; and so they have done. This is not something of small consequence, but rather it has led to the miserable spiritual condition which prevails today. For a certainty, the prophecy is fulfilled: "And the messenger will say,

'O my Lord, my people indeed treated this Qur'ān as discarded'" [Qur'ān 25.31].

Revelation is the proof of God; it causes even disbelievers to acknowledge God. "And if thou ask them, 'Who sends down water from the sky and therewith gives life to the earth after its death?' they will surely say, 'God'." [Qur'ān 29.64]. In other words, it is by the heavenly water of revelation, that the disbelievers appreciate the existence of God. The *Rabbil ālamīn* cannot be satisfactorily conveyed by the material wonders of this created world, nor even by His Book alone. God is His own proof. But few are the scholars who understand the Qur'ānic concept of spiritual death and life. By their thinking, the Holy Qur'ān has become a disjointed and imperfect thing. For instance, they recognise not the reason why God speaks of sending the Book to the Holy Prophet [saw] [Qur'ān 16.65] and then in the following verse God says, "And God has sent down water from the sky, and has quickened therewith the earth after its death" [Qur'ān 16.66]. Again, God says He is The Truth [Qur'ān 22.63] and follows this by explaining He sends down water from the sky and the earth becomes green [Qur'ān 22.64]; it is spiritual water which descends from The Truth. "By the cloud which gives rain after rain, and the earth which opens out, it is surely a decisive word" [Qur'ān 86.12-14]. But how few are those who understand! They seek to cause the orchards of Faith to flourish by their own feeble efforts, but this is not God's way: "You could not cause their trees to grow. Is there a god besides God?" [Qur'ān 27.61].

Bearing in mind the fundamental principles of God's eternal mercy and grace, it is an interesting question how the Muslim nation have justified the extirpation of God's mercy. What has happened is that the scholars have taken specific terminologies, and interpreted them against the fundamental principles of Islām so as to justify their own personal deprivation of experiencing God's revelation. But their interpretation denies spiritual reality. They say the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah suffice, whereas they have the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah and their plight is abject. They say that the Holy Prophet [saw]'s status as *khātam an nabiyyīn* (seal of the prophets) signifies effectively the abrogation of Divine communication, whereas he is praiseworthy and he comprises the human-Divine interface *par*

excellent. They are entirely heedless of authentic pronouncements whereby the Holy Prophet [saw] explains that his finality permits the continuation of prophethood as a reflection of his own prophethood, in the same way that we construct mosques as a reflection of his own mosque; he says, "I am the last of the Apostles, and my mosque is the last of the mosques" [143]. Furthermore, they insist on an interpretation of the Arabic word *ba'd* which needlessly contravenes God's *raḥmāniyyat*. That is to say, they insist that the Holy Prophet [saw]'s famous declarations that there is no prophet *ba'd* himself can only be interpreted as there is no prophet "after" himself in time. Then would they also insist that the Qu'rānic references to *ba'dillāh* [Qur'ān 45.7, 24] signify "after God" in time?

The truth is that the word *ba'd* carries connotations such as "outside of" and "in the absence of". As God says, "Who then will guide him, *ba'dillāh* (if not God, outside of God)? [Qur'ān 45.24]. Again, Prophet Moses [as] says, "Evil is that which you did in my absence" [Qur'ān 7.151]. Another instance is, "So what is there in the absence of truth except error?" [Qur'ān 10.33]. By understanding correctly the meanings of *ba'd*, we attain a more profound appreciation for the narrations from the Holy Prophet [saw]. This noble Messenger did not speak as a child speaks, God forbid, that we should not ponder his words for their ineffable wisdom. It is proclaimed loudly by the Medieval-minded scholars that the Holy Prophet [saw] said, "The Isrāelīs used to be ruled and guided by prophets: Whenever a prophet died, another would take over his place. And there will be no prophet *ba'd* myself, and there will be *khulafā'* (vicegerents) who will increase in number." [144]. Would that the scholars contemplate the height and breadth of the prophetic utterance. This narration means only to say that no prophet may now be *ba'd* (outside of) the prophethood of the Holy Prophet [saw], and they must be his vicegerents.

It may be thought that the continuation or termination of messengerhood lies outside of the remit of the Flower, so why to mention them here. However, on reflection, we find that messengerhood is tied up inextricably with the Flower. Faith is not written by the scholars, but by God Himself: "These are they in whose hearts God has inscribed faith" [Qur'ān 58.23]. That is to say, God writes faith and the hearts are mere

parchments for His hand. There is not a single instance in the history of humankind where faith was established by the scholars; rather, God Himself always endowed faith through His messengers. That process continues, and will be necessary for as long as *īmān* is necessary. It is clearly foretold that a time would come when faith would leave the earth and ascend to the stars, and then God's Messenger would manifest again to humankind, and he would bring faith down from heaven, and this is immense grace [145]. That is to say, the Holy Prophet [saw] himself prophesied that faith would depart from the world, and his second manifestation would retrieve it. Then who can possess faith, without finding the second manifestation?

A final word should be said regarding the Promised Messiah [as]. He is the Vicegerent of God, the appointed Leader, the *'abd* or *ghulām* or servant of Muḥammad [saw], the Messiah for the Muslim nation, and the manifestation of messengerhood. By way of illustrating the universal significance of the Flower, I have turned the reader's attention to the wealth of holy personages on whom God has bestowed His guidance. But my loving advice to the reader is that he or she should sharpen their *īmān* by striking it repeatedly against the sword of the Promised Messiah [as], which is to say the sword of the Holy Prophet [saw] himself. This is the experience I have gained in the writing of these pages, that all other blades are now rusty and worn.

The praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds.

Notes

Every endeavour has been made to follow the Vancouver Referencing System when providing references. The reader should note that the edition and year of publication may be unavailable for texts published in Arabic, Urdu and Farsi.

For the facility of those who wish to locate and read the original source material, titles such as Shaykh, Imām and the Promised Messiah have been omitted from the references. This in no way implies disrespect for the revered authors of these works. Authors' names have been given as they are printed on the book or article. For instance, notes may refer to the same author alternatively as Al-Ghazzali or Al-Ghazālī.

1 Rumi JM, transl. by Nicholson RA. The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi, Vol. II. 1st ed. London: Cambridge University; 1926. v.1141, p.280

2 Al Majlisī MB. Biḥār al Anwār, Vol. 9.2. 1st ed. Qum: Ihyaa al Kutub al-Islaamiyyah; 2006. p.32
Please note that the above narration is from the monumental collection of the renowned Shī'ī scholar Allāmah Majlisī.
Mention of the immense hardship suffered by Prophet Muḥammad saw is also found in the Sunnī tradition, in: Bin 'Īsa Bin Sawra AIM. Sūnan At Tirmidhī. 1st ed. Beirut: Daar Al-Ma'rifa; 2002. Kitāb Ṣifatil Qiyāmati war Raqāiqi wal Wara'i 'an Rasūlillāh, ḥadīth 2472, p.969

3 Ahmad MG. Malfoozat, Vol. 10. London: Mubarak A Saqi; 1984. p.124

4 Al-Bukhari M, transl. by Khan MM. Sahih Al-Bukhari. Madina Al Nabawiya: Dar Ahya Us-Sunnah. Vol. VIII, Kitāb Al-Qadar, pp.389-90

5 Murata S. The Tao of Islam. 1st ed. Lahore: Suhail Academy; 2001. p.85

6 Ibn al-Arabi M, transl. by Austin RWJ. The Bezels of Wisdom. 1st ed. New York: Paulist Press; 1980. pp.55-6
Please note that Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī expresses similar thoughts in: Al-Jīlānī AA, transl. by Al-Jerrahi TB. The Secret of Secrets. 1st ed. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society; 1992. p.62

7 The Secret of Secrets. *Ibid.* p.96

8 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. I, Kitāb Al-Īmān, p.17
Please note that the Holy Prophet saw defines the five pillars of Islām in this narration: Declaration of Faith, Prayer, Almsgiving, Pilgrimage and Fasting.

9 Muslim AH, transl. by Matraji M. Sahih Muslim. 1st ed. Beirut: Dar el Fiker; 1993. Vol. II A, Kitab al-Sawm, p.180

10 Aḥmad MG, transl. by Khān MZ. The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. 2nd ed. Tilford: Islām International; 2004. p.256

11 Plato. Selected Writings. 1st ed. London: The Collector's Library of Essential Thinkers; 2004. pp.281-3
Please note that this allegory is taken from Plato's Republic.

12 Ahmad MG, transl. by Khan MZ. Commentary on the Holy Quran, Vol. 1, Surah Fatiha. 2nd ed. Tilford: Islam International; 2004. pp.114-5

13 Aḥmad MG, transl. by Khān MZ. The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. 2nd ed. Tilford: Islām International; 2004. p.125

14 Commentary on the Holy Quran, Vol. 1, Surah Fatiha. *Ibid.* p.193

15 Aḥmad MG, transl. by Khān MZ. The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. 1st ed. Tilford: Islām International; 2005. pp.72-3

16 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III, *Ibid.* p.98

17 Transl. by Mitchell S. The Bhagavad Gita. 1st ed. London: Rider; 2000. v.5.22, p.85

18 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.76

19 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* pp.487-8

20 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. IX, Kitāb Al-Tauhīd, p.369

Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. IV, Kitāb Bidā' Al-Khalq, p.279

21 The Essence of Islam, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.262

22 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. VI, Kitāb Al-Tafsīr, p.490

23 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.262

24 Bin Bahraam AMA. Sūnan Ad Dārimi. Beirut: Dār al-fikr. Vol. I, pp.3-4

25 The Revised English Bible, The New Testament. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1989. Luke 6.21, p.55

26 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. VIII, Kitāb Ar-Riqā'iq, p.327

27 Al-Ghazzali, transl. by Field C. The Alchemy of Happiness. 1st ed. London: The Octagon Press; 2001. pp.36-7

28 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. II, Kitāb Al-Janā'iz, p.219-20

29 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. II, Kitāb Al-Janā'iz, p.189
Aḥmad MBM. Life of Muḥammad [sa]. 2nd ed. Tilford: Islam International; 2005. p.295

30 Al-Ghazālī AH, transl. by Winter TJ. On Disciplining the Soul and On Breaking the Two Desires. 1st ed. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society; 1995. p.24
Please note that the Promised Messiah [as] offers an incisive exposition of the relationship between *khalq* and *khulq* in: Ahmad MG, transl. by Khan MZ. The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam. 2nd ed. Tilford: Islam International; 1996. pp.17-8

31 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. I B, Kitab al-Salat, p.436

32 On Disciplining the Soul and On Breaking the Two Desires. *Ibid.* p.167

33 The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam. *Ibid.* p.31

34 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. III, Kitāb Ash-Sharūṭ, p.547
Life of Muḥammad [sa]. *Ibid.* pp.197-8

35 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.80

36 Schimmel A. Mystical Dimensions of Islam. 1st ed. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press; 1975. pp.98-9, 152-3

37 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.202

38 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.194

39 Rumi JM, transl. by Nicholson RA. The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi, Vol. I. 1st ed. London: Cambridge University; 1926. vv.2505-6, p.136
Please note that these particular verses include interpolations of Maulāna Rūmī's original text by later scholars. However, the earliest known manuscripts of Mathnawi Vol. IV, v.521 do refer to the human entity as both microcosm and macrocosm.

40 The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam. *Ibid.* pp. 94-8

41 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.75

42 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.198

43 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.357

44 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.357

45 Ibn Abī Tālib 'A, transl. by Reza SA. Nahjul Balagha. 4th ed. Rome: European Islamic Cultural Centre; 1984. Sermon 191, p.384

46 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* pp.355-6

47 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.357

48 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* pp.412-3

49 Bin Ḥanbal A. Al Musnad. 1st ed. Beirut: Aalam al Kutub; 1998. Vol. V, ḥadīth 17250, p.835

50 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. I A, Kitab al-Iman, p.62

51 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.361

52 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.271

53 Commentary on the Holy Quran, Vol. 1, Surah Fatiha. *Ibid.* p.248

54 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.271

55 The Revised English Bible. *Ibid.* The New Testament, Mark 10.18, p.40

56 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.361-2

57 Transl. by Fronsdal G. The Dhammapada. 1st ed. Boston: Shambhala; 2006. v.212, p.57

58 The Bhagavad Gita. *Ibid.* v.10.41, p.130

59 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. I A, Kitab al-Iman, pp.61-2
Please note that the we have preferred "God is Beautiful, He loves all beauty" to Matraji's translation "Allah is Graceful and He loves Grace". The original Arabic reads *Allāhu Jamīl yuḥibbul jamāla.*

60 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.182

61 Ibn 'Arabī M, transl. by Chodkiewicz M. Seal of the Saints. 1st ed. Lahore: Suhail Academy; 2001. p.1
Please note that the original Arabic is found in: Ibn 'Arabī. Al Futuhat al Makiyya, Vol. 3. Beirut: Sader printing and publishing house. pp.449-50

62 Bercholz S, Kohn SC (ed). The Buddha and His Teachings. 1st ed. Boston: Shambhala; 2003. p.15

63 The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam. *Ibid.* p.3

64 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. IX, Kitāb Al-Tauhīd, p.452

65 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. VIII, Kitāb Ar-Riqā'iq, p.337

66 Al-Ghazālī AH, transl. by Burrell DB, Daher N. The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God. 2nd ed. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society; 1995. pp.124-6
Please note that Imām Al Ghazālī describes God's attribute of *Al Ḥaqq* (The Truth, outside of which everything in itself is false), and then goes on to acknowledge that a man may be "so absorbed in the Truth that he has no room for anything else".

67 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* pp.251-9

68 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.54

69 Al Qushaīrī AQ. Al Risāla al Qushaīriyya. Egypt: Mustafa al Bābī al Halabī & Sons; 1940. p.68

70 Al Risāla al Qushaīriyya. *Ibid.* p.65

71 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.261

72 Tzu L, transl. by Star J. Tao Te Ching, The Definitive Edition. 1st ed. New York: Penguin Group; 2003. v.4, p.17

73 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.60

74 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.398

75 Commentary on the Holy Quran, Vol. 1, Surah Fatiha. *Ibid.* pp.1,5

76 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.86

77 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.356

78 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. I B, Kitab al-Ṣalat, p.419

79 Nahjul Balagha. *Ibid.* Sermon 108, p.253

80 Simpson JB (ed). Simpson's Contemporary Quotations. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; 1988. p.245. Quotation attributed to Tennessee Williams.
Please note that TS Eliot proposes a similar understanding of hell in: Eliot TS. The Cocktail Party. 1st ed. London: Faber and Faber; 1974. Act 1 Sc 3 L 418, p.99
The renowned English poet John Milton portrays Satan as declaring, "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell" in: Milton J. Paradise Lost. 1st ed. New York: Norton; 2005. Book IV L 75, p.79

81 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* pp.444-5

82 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.444

83 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.441

84 Nahjul Balagha. *Ibid.* Letter 10, p.469

85 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.417

86 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.419

87 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* pp. 421, 431

88 The Esseņce of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.444

89 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.436-7

90 Lane EW. Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 3. 1st ed. London: Williams and Norgate; 1863. p.1003

91 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* pp.55-9

92 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.56

93 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. I, Kitāb Al-Imān, p.42

94 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.57

95 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.57

96 Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 4. *Ibid.* p.1584

97 Sūnan At Tirmidhī. *Ibid.* Kitāb Mā Jā' Fīsh Shukri Liman Aḥsana Ilaika, ḥadīth 1954, p.786

98 Nahjul Balagha. *Ibid.* Sermon 190, p.383

99 Mohaghegh M. Notes on the Spiritual Physic of al-Rāzī. Studia Islamica 1967; 26: 5-22, at 10
Please note that this philosopher should not be confused with the eminent commentator of the Holy Qur'ān Fakhr ud-Dīn Al Rāzī who lived in Persia during the 6th century after the emigration of the Holy Prophet saw from Makkah.

100 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. II, Bāb Al-Tahajjad bil Lail, p.146-7
Please note that these words are taken from the *Istikhārah* Prayer, recommended by the Holy Prophet saw for whenever his companions sought Divine guidance regarding an enterprise.

101 Al Ghazālī AH. Ihyā 'Ulūm al Dīn, Vol. 4. Beirut: Al Ma'rifa Publishing House. p.245

102 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. IX, Kitāb Al-Tauhīd, p.419

103 Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 4. *Ibid.* p.1646

104 Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 4. *Ibid.* p.1643

105 Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 4. *Ibid.* pp.1643-6

106 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. IV B, Kitab al-Zuhd wa al-Raqa'iq, p.370

107 Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 4. *Ibid.* p.1643

108 Nahjul Balagha.*Ibid.* Saying 320, p.644

109 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.250

110 On Disciplining the Soul and On Breaking the Two Desires. *Ibid.* p.33

111 Al Risāla al Qushaīriyya. *Ibid.* p.159

112 Smith M. Muslim Women Mystics. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oneworld Publications; 2001. p.113

113 Muslim Women Mystics. *Ibid.* p.50

114 Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 8. *Ibid.* pp.2995-6

115 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.467

116 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.251

117 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* pp.227-8

118 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.189

119 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.261

120 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.37

121 The Secret of Secrets. *Ibid.* p.29

122 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. I A, Kitab al-Iman, pp.46-56

123 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. VII, Kitāb Al-Libās, p.516

124 Nahjul Balagha.*Ibid.* Sermon 86, p.217

125 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. I A, Kitab al-Ṭahārah, p.164

126 Nietzche F, transl. by Kaufmann W. Thus Spake Zarathustra. 1st ed. New York: The Modern Library; 1995. p.12

Please note that Nietzche did not mean to propose that God is factually dead, but rather that faith in God is dead, and so effectively God is dead in the hearts of the people.

127 Al-Makki AṬ. Qūt al-Qulūb, Vol. 1. Beirut: Sader Publishing House. p.236

128 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.242

129 Jaleel A. Synopsis of Istighfar. Review of Religions 2007; 102 (1): 58-63, at 61

130 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.335

131 Sūnan At Tirmidhī. *Ibid.* Kitāb al Manāqibi 'an Rasūlillāh, ḥadīth 3609, p.1382
Please note that in this narration, the Holy Prophet [saw] is reported to say that he was made a prophet when Adam [as] was between the spirit and the body.

132 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. I, Kitāb Aṣ Ṣalāt, p.271
Life of Muḥammad [sa]. *Ibid.* p.286

133 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.329

134 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. IV, Kitāb Al Jihād, p.105

135 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.250

136 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* p.213

137 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* pp.59-66

138 The Essence of Islām, Vol. I. *Ibid.* p.183

139 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. IV B, Kitab al Janna wa Sifat Na'imiha wa Ahliha, p.317

140 Tao Te Ching, The Definitive Edition. *Ibid.* v.10, p.23

141 The Essence of Islām, Vol. II. *Ibid.* pp.141-3

142 The Essence of Islām, Vol. III. *Ibid.* p.115

143 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. II B, Kitab al-Hajj, p.334

144 Sahih Al-Bukhari. *Ibid.* Vol. IV, Kitāb Aḥadīth Al Anbiyā', pp.439-40
Please note that we have not used Khan's translation which reads, "There will be no prophet after me, but there will be Caliphs who will increase in number". The original Arabic reads *wa innahu lā nabī ba'dī, wa sayakūn khulafā' fa yakthurūn.*

145 Sahih Muslim. *Ibid.* Vol. IV A, Kitab Fada'll al-Sahabah, p.163
Please note that this narration relates to an enigmatic prophecy found in the Holy Qur'ān 62.3-4, regarding the spiritual advent of the Holy Prophet [saw] amongst a people who had not yet joined the fold of Islām. The narration explains that this prophecy would be fulfilled by a person of Persian origin, and that this person would restore Faith after its departure from the world.

Moosa Qureshi is a medical practitioner in London, UK. He is the author of numerous articles including *The Immaculate Conception* (Review of Religions) and *Moses: Unmasked or Maligned?* (Muslim Sunrise). This is his first book.

The Flower of Faith

More than a century ago, the German philosopher Nietzche asserted that God is dead, and the Promised Messiah [as] affirmed that God is Alive. *The Flower of Faith* describes a spiritual methodology by which the reader may establish a relationship with the Living God. It includes:

- an explanation of important concepts in Islamic spirituality;
- the three fundamental principles of Faith;
- the seven steps on the path to God;
- a framework for subjugating the ego and worldly desires.

'Just to let you know that I have found [the first draft of the book] as very good. I pray that Allah Almighty enhances your knowledge in abundance.'

Hadrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, Khalīfatul Masīh V [aba],
Head of the Ahmadiyya Community in Islam

'It will certainly help the readers to understand the intricate and uphill process of re-uniting of human souls with Allah, the Creator.'

Maulāna Mubasher Ahmad, Imām, Baetul Jaamay Mosque,
Glen Ellyn, Illinois

ISBN-13: 978-1-882494-50-7
ISBN-10: 1-882494-50-4
90000
9 781882 494507

LPI
Publications